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MARY MARSTON BY GEORGE MAC DONALD, LL.D.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MARY MARSTON

BY

GEORGE MAC DONALD, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "DAVID ELGINBROD," "MALCOLM," ETC.

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1881.

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MARY MASTON

BY

GEORGE MAC DONALD, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE PRINCE OF THE CASTLE," "THE BROTHERS KILPATRICK," &c.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

THE LATE MISS MARY MASTON

VOL. II.

LONDON:

WILLIAM AND ALBERT, 15, N. B. ROAD, ST. MARK'S PLACE.

1871.

THE LONDON AND NEW YORK AGENTS.

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MARY MARSTON.

CHAPTER I.

MARY AND LETTY.

WHEN her landlady announced a visitor, Letty, not having yet one friend in London, could not think who it should be. When Mary entered, she sprang to her feet and stood staring: what with being so much in the house, and seeing so few people, the poor girl had, I think, grown a little stupid. But when the fact of Mary's presence cleared itself to her, she rushed forward with a cry, fell into her arms, and burst out weeping. Mary held her fast until she had a little come to herself, then, pushing her gently away to the length of her arms, looked at her.

She was not a sight to make one happy. She was no longer the plump fresh girl that used to go singing about; nor was she merely thin and pale, she looked unhealthy. Things could not be going well with her. Had her dress been only disordered, that might have been accidental, but it looked neglected—was not merely dingy, but plainly shabby, and to Mary's country eyes, appeared on the wrong side of clean. Presently, as those eyes got accustomed to the miserable light, they spied in the skirt of her gown a perfunctory darn, revealing but too evidently,

that to Letty there no longer seemed occasion for being particular. The sadness of it all sunk to Mary's heart: Letty had not found marriage a grand affair!

But Mary had not come into the world to be sad, or to help another to be sad. Sorrowful we may often have to be, but to indulge in sorrow is either not to know, or to deny God our Saviour. True, her heart ached for Letty; and the ache immediately laid itself as close to Letty's ache as it could lie; but that was only the advance-guard of her army of salvation, the light cavalry of sympathy: the next division was help; and behind that lay patience, and strength, and hope, and faith, and joy. This last, modern teachers, having failed to regard it as a virtue, may well decline to regard as a duty; but he is a poor Christian indeed in whom joy has not at least a growing share, and Mary was not a poor Christian—at least for the time she had been learning, and as Christians go in the present aeon of their history. Her whole nature drew itself together confronting the destroyer, whatever he might be, in possession of Letty. How to help she could not yet tell, but sympathy was already at its work.

"You're not looking your best, Letty," she said, clasping her again in her arms.

With a little choking, Letty assured her she was quite well, only rather overcome with the pleasure of seeing her so unexpectedly.

"How is Mr. Helmer?" asked Mary.

"Quite well—and very busy," answered Letty—a little hurriedly Mary thought. "—But," she added, in a tone of disappointment, "you always used to call him Tom!"

"Oh!" answered Mary with a smile, "one must be careful how one takes liberties with married people. A

certain mysterious change seems to pass over some of them; they are not the same somehow, and you have to make your acquaintance with them all over again from the beginning."

"I shouldn't think such people's acquaintance worth making over again," said Letty.

"How can you tell what it may be worth?" said Mary, "—they are so different from what they were? Their friendship may now be one that won't change so easily."

"Ah! don't be hard on me, Mary. I have never ceased to love you."

"I am *so* glad!" answered Mary. "People don't generally take much to me—at least not to come *near* me. But you can *be* friends without *having* friends," she added, with a sententiousness she had inherited.

"I don't quite understand you," said Letty sadly; "but then I never could quite, you know. Tom finds me very stupid."

These words strengthened Mary's suspicion, from the first a probability, that all was not going well between the two; but she shrunk from any approach to confidences with *one* of a married pair. To have such, she felt instinctively, would be a breach of unity, except indeed that were already, and irreparably, broken. To encourage in any married friend the placing of a confidence that excludes the other, is to encourage that friend's self-degradation. But neither was this a fault to which Letty could have been tempted; she loved her Tom too much for it: with all her feebleness, there was in Letty not a little of childlike greatness, born of faith.

But although Mary would make Letty tell nothing, she was not the less anxious to discover, that she might, if possible, help. She would observe: side-lights often

reveal more than direct illumination. It might be for Letty, and not for Mrs. Redmain, she had been sent. He who made time in time would show.

"Are you going to be long in London, Mary?" asked Letty.

"Oh, a long time!" answered Mary, with a loving glance.

Letty's eyes fell, and she looked troubled.

"I am so sorry, Mary," she said, "that I cannot ask you to come here! We have only these two rooms, and—and—you see—Mrs. Helmer is not very liberal to Tom, and—because they—don't get on together very well—as I suppose everybody knows—Tom won't—he won't consent to—to—"

"You little goose!" cried Mary; "you don't think I would come down on you like a devouring dragon, without even letting you know, and finding whether it would suit you!—I have got a situation in London."

"A situation!" echoed Letty. "What can you mean, Mary? You haven't left your own shop, and gone into somebody else's?"

"No, not exactly that," replied Mary, laughing; "but I have no doubt most people would think that by far the more prudent thing to have done."

"Then I don't," said Letty, with a little flash of her old enthusiasm. "Whatever you do, Mary, I am sure will always be the best."

"I am glad I have so much of your good opinion, Letty; but I am not sure I shall have it still, when I have told you what I have done. Indeed, I am not quite sure myself that I have done wisely; but if I have made a mistake, it is from having listened to love more than to prudence."

"What!" cried Letty; "you're married, Mary?"

And here a strange thing, yet the commonest in the world, appeared: had her own marriage proved to Letty the most blessed of fates, she could not have shown more delight at the idea of Mary's. I think men find women a little incomprehensible in this matter of their friends' marriage: in their larger-heartedness, I presume, women are able to hope for their friends, even when they have lost all hope for themselves.

"No," replied Mary, amused at having thus misled her. "It is neither so bad nor so good as that. But I was far from comfortable in the shop without my father, and kept thinking how to find a life more suitable for me. It was not plain to me that my lot was cast there any longer, and one has no right to choose difficulty; for, even if difficulty be the right thing for you, the difficulty you choose can't be the right difficulty. Those that are given to choosing, my father said, are given to regretting. Then it happened that I fell in love—not with a gentleman—don't look like that, Letty—but with a lady; and as the lady took a small fancy to me at the same time, and wanted to have me about her, here I am."

"But surely that is not a situation fit for one like you, Mary!" cried Letty, almost in consternation; for, notwithstanding her opposition to her aunt's judgment in the individual case of her friend, Letty's own judgments, where she had any, were mostly of this world. "I suppose you are a kind of—of—companion to your lady-friend?"

"Or a kind of lady's-maid, or a kind of dressmaker, or a kind of humble friend—something like a dog, perhaps—only not to be quite so much loved and petted! In truth, Letty, I do not know what I am, or what I am going to be; but I shall find out before long, and where's

the use of knowing, any more than anything else before it's wanted?"

"You take my breath away, Mary! The thing doesn't seem at all like you! It's not consistent!—Mary Marston in a menial position! I can't get a hold of it!"

"You remind me," said Mary, laughing, "of what my father said to Mr. Turnbull once. They were nearer quarrelling then than ever I saw them.—You remember my father's way, Letty—how he would say a thing too quietly even to smile with it? I can't tell you what a delight it is to me to talk to anybody that knew him!—Mr. Turnbull imagined he did not know what he was about, for the thoughts my father was thinking could not have lived a moment in Mr. Turnbull. 'You see, John Turnbull,' my father said, 'no man can look so inconsistent as one whose principles are not understood; for hardly in anything will that man do as his friend must have thought he would.'—I suppose you think, Letty," Mary went on, with a merry air, "that, for the sake of consistency, I should never do anything but sell behind a counter?"

"In that case," said Letty, "I ought to have married a milkman, for a dairy is the only thing I understand. I can't help Tom ever so little!—But I suppose it wouldn't be possible for two to write poetry together, even if they were husband and wife, and both of them clever!"

"Something like it has been tried, I believe," answered Mary, "but not with much success. I suppose, when a man sets himself to make anything, he must have it all his own way, or he can't do it."

"I suppose that's it. I know Tom is very angry with the editor when he wants to alter anything he has written. I'm sure Tom's right too. You can't think how much better Tom's way always is!—He makes that quite clear,

even to poor stupid me. But then, you know, Tom's a genius; that's one thing there's *no* doubt of!—But you haven't told me yet where you are."

"You remember Miss Mortimer of Durnmelling?"

"Quite well, of course."

"She is Mrs. Redmain now: I am with her."

"You don't mean it! Why, Tom knows her very well! He has been several times to parties at her house."

"And not you too?" asked Mary.

"Oh, dear, no!" answered Letty, laughing, superior at Mary's ignorance. "It's not the fashion in London, at least for distinguished persons like my Tom, to take their wives to parties."

"Are there no ladies at those parties, then?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Letty, smiling again at Mary's ignorance of the world, "the grandest of ladies—duchesses and all. You don't know what a favourite Tom is in the highest circles!"

Now Mary could believe almost anything bearing on Tom's being a favourite, for she herself liked him a great deal more than she approved of him; but she could not see the sense of his going to parties without his wife, neither could she see that the *height* of the circle in which he was a favourite, made any difference. She had old-fashioned notions of a man and his wife being one flesh, and felt a breach of the law where they were separated, whatever the custom—reason there could be none. But Letty seemed much too satisfied to give her any light on the matter. Did it seem to her so natural, that she could not understand Mary's difficulty? She could not help suspecting, however, that there might be something in this recurrence of a separation absolute as death—for was it not a passing of one into a region where the other could not follow?—to account for the

change in her.—The same moment, as if Letty divined what was passing in Mary's thought, and were not altogether content with the thing herself, but would gladly justify what she could not explain, she added, in the tone of an unanswerable argument,—

“Besides, Mary, how could I get a dress fit to wear at such parties? You wouldn't have me go, and look like a beggar! That would be to disgrace Tom. Everybody in London judges everybody by the clothes she wears. You should hear Tom's descriptions of the ladies' dresses when he comes home!”

Mary was on the verge of crying out indignantly, “Then, if he can't take you, why doesn't he stop at home with you?” but she bethought herself in time to hold her peace. She settled it with herself, however, that Tom must have less heart, or yet more muddled brains, than she had thought.

“So then,” reverted Letty, as if willing to turn definitively from the subject, “you are actually living with the beautiful Mrs. Redmain! What a lucky girl you are! You will see no end of grand people! You will see my Tom sometimes—when I can't!” she added, with a sigh that went to Mary's heart.

“Poor thing!” she said to herself, “it isn't anything much out of the way she wants—only a little more of a foolish husband's company!”

It was no wonder that Tom found Letty dull, for he had just as little of his own in him as she, and thought he had a great store—which is what sends a man most swiftly along the road to that final poverty, in which even that which he has shall be taken from him.

Mary did not stay so long with Letty as both would have liked, for she did not yet know enough of Hesper's

ways. When she got home, she learned that she had a headache, and had not yet made her appearance.

CHAPTER II.

THE EVENING STAR.

NOTWITHSTANDING her headache, however, Mrs. Redmain was going in the evening to a small fancy-ball, meant for a sort of rehearsal to a great one when the season should arrive. The part and costume she had chosen were the suggestion of her own name: she would represent the Evening Star, clothed in the early twilight; and neither was she unfit for the part, nor was the dress she had designed altogether unsuitable either to herself or to the part. But she had sufficient confidence neither in herself nor her maid to forestall a desire for Mary's opinion. After luncheon therefore, she sent for Miss Marston to her bed-room.

Mary found her half dressed, Folter in attendance, a great heap of pink lying on the bed.

"Sit down, Mary," said Hesper, pointing to a chair; "I want your advice. But I must first explain. Where I am going this evening, nobody is to be herself except me. I am not to be Mrs. Redmain, though, but Hesper.—You know what Hesper means?"

Mary said she knew, and waited—a little anxious; for sideways in her eyes glowed the pink of the chosen Hesperian clouds, and if she should not like it, what could be done at that late hour?

"There is my dress," continued the Evening Star, with a glance of her eyes, for Folter was busied with her hair: "I want to know your opinion of it."

Folter gave a toss of her head that seemed to say, "Have not *I* spoken?" but what it really did mean, how should other mortal know? for the main obstructions to understanding are profundity and shallowness, and the latter is far the more perplexing of the two.

"I should like to see it on first," said Mary: she was in doubt whether the colour—bright, to suggest the brightest of sunset-clouds—would suit Hesper's complexion. Then again, she had always associated the name *Hesper* with a later, a solemnly lovely period of twilight, having little in common with the colour so voluminous in the background.

Hesper had a good deal of appreciative faculty, and knew therefore when she liked, and when she did not like a thing; but she had very little originaive faculty—so little that, when anything was wrong, she could do next to nothing to set it right. There was small originality in taking a suggestion for her part from her name, and less in the idea, following by concatenation, of adopting for her costume sunset colours upon a flimsy material, which might more than hint at clouds. She had herself, with the assistance of Sepia and Folter, made choice of the particular pink; but, although it continued altogether delightful in the eyes of her maid, it had, upon nearer and prolonged acquaintance, become doubtful in hers; and she now waited, with no little anxiety, the judgment of Mary, who sat silently thinking.

"Have you nothing to say?" she asked at length, impatiently.

"Please, ma'am," replied Mary, "I must think, if I am to be of any use. I am doing my best, but you must let me be quiet."

Half annoyed, half pleased, Hesper was silent, and Mary went on thinking. All was still, save for the slight

noises Folter made, as, like a machine, she went on heartlessly brushing her mistress's hair, which kept emitting little crackles, as of dissatisfaction with her handling. Mary would now take a good gaze at the lovely creature, now abstract herself from the visible, and try to call up the vision of her as the real Hesper, not a Hesper dressed up—a process which had in it hope for the lady, but not much for the dress upon the bed.

At last Folter had done her part.

"I suppose you *must* see it on!" said Hesper, and rose.

Folter jerked herself to the bed, took the dress, arranged it on her arms, got up on a chair, dropped it over her mistress's head, got down, and having pulled it this way and that for a while, fastened it here, undone it there, and fastened it again, several times, exclaimed, in a tone whose confidence was meant to forestall the critical impertinence she dreaded,—

"There, ma'am! If you don't look the loveliest woman in the room, I shall never trust my eyes again."

Mary held her peace, for the commonplace style of the dress but added to her dissatisfaction with the colour. It was all puffed and bubbled and blown about, here and there and everywhere, so that the form of the woman was lost in the frolic shapelessness of the cloud. The whole, if whole it could be called, was a miserable attempt at combining fancy and fashion, and, in result, an ugly nothing.

"I see you don't like it!" said Hesper, with a mingling of displeasure and dismay. "I wish you had come a few days sooner! It is much too late to do anything now. I might just as well have gone without showing it to you! Here, Folter!"

With a look almost of disgust, she began to pull off the dress, in which, a few hours later, she would yet make the attempt to enchant an assembly.

"Oh, ma'am!" cried Mary, "I wish you had told me yesterday. There would have been time then.—And I don't know," she added, seeing disgust change to mortification on Hesper's countenance, "but something might be done yet."

"Oh, indeed!" dropped from Folter's lips, with an indescribable expression.

"What can be done?" said Hesper angrily. "There can be no time for anything."

"If only we had the stuff!" said Mary. "That shade doesn't suit your complexion. It ought to be much, much darker—in fact a different colour altogether."

Folter was furious, but restrained herself sufficiently to preserve some calmness of tone, although her face turned almost blue with the effort, as she said,—

"Miss Marston is not long from the country, ma'am, and don't know what's suitable to a London drawing-room."

Her mistress was too dejected to snub her impertinence.

"What colour were you thinking of, Miss Marston?" Hesper asked, with a stiffness that would have been more in place had Mary volunteered the opinion she had been asked to give. She was out of temper with Mary from feeling certain she was right, and believing there was no remedy.

"I could not describe it," answered Mary. "And indeed the colour I have in my mind may not be to be had. I have seen it somewhere, but whether in a stuff, or only in nature, I cannot at this moment be certain."

"Where's the good of talking like that—excuse me, ma'am—it's more than I can bear—when the ball comes off in a few hours?" cried Folter, ending with eyes of murder on Mary.

"If you would allow me, ma'am," said Mary, "I should

like much to try whether I could not find something that would suit you and your idea too. However well you might look in that, you would owe it no thanks. The worst is, I know nothing of the London shops."

"I should think not!" remarked Folter with emphasis.

"I would send you in the brougham, if I thought it was of any use," said Hesper. "Folter could take you to the proper places."

"Folter would be of no use to me," said Mary. "If your coachman knows the best shops, that will be enough."

"But there's no time to make up anything," objected Hesper despondingly, not the less with a glimmer of hope in her heart.

"Not like that," answered Mary; "but there is much there as unnecessary as it is ugly. If Folter is good at her needle—"

"I won't take up a single stitch. It would be mere waste of labour," cried Folter.

"Then please, ma'am," said Mary, "let Folter have that dress ready, and if I don't succeed, you have something to wear."

"I hate it. I won't go if you don't find me another."

"Some people may like it, though I don't," said Mary.

"Not a doubt of that!" said Folter.

"Ring the bell," said her mistress.

The woman obeyed, and the moment after repented she had not given warning on the spot instead. The brougham was ordered immediately, and in a few minutes Mary was standing at a counter in a large shop, looking at various stuffs, of which the young man waiting on her soon perceived she knew the qualities and capabilities better than he.

She had set her heart on carrying out Hesper's idea, but in better fashion; and after great pains taken, and no little trouble given, left the shop well satisfied with her success. And now for the greater difficulty!

She drove straight to Letty's lodging, and there dismissing the brougham, presented herself, with a great parcel in her arms, for the second time that day, at the door of her room, as unexpected as the first, and even more to the joy of her solitary friend.

She knew that Letty was good at her needle. And Letty was, indeed, even now, by fits, fond of using it; and on several occasions, when her supply of novels had for a day run short, had asked a dressmaker who lived above, to let her help her for an hour or two: before Mary had finished her story, she was untying the parcel, and preparing to receive her instructions. Nor had they been at work many minutes, when Letty bethought her of calling in the help of the said dressmaker; so that presently there were three of them busy as bees—one with genius, one with experience, and all with faculty. The notions of the first were quickly taken up by the other two, and, the design of the dress being simplicity itself, Mary got all done she wanted in shorter time than she had thought possible. The landlady sent for a cab, and Mary was home with the improbability in more than time for Mrs. Redmain's toilette. It was with some triumph, tempered with some trepidation, that she carried it to her room.

There Folter was in the act of persuading her mistress of the necessity of beginning to dress: Miss Marston, she said, knew nothing of what she had undertaken; and, even if she arrived in time, it would be with something too ridiculous for any lady to appear in—when Mary entered, and was received with a cry of

delight from Hesper; in proportion to whose increasing disgust with the pink robe, was her pleasure when she caught sight of Mary's colours, as she undid the parcel: when she lifted the dress on her arm for a first effect, she was enraptured with it—aerial in texture, of the hue of a smoky rose, deep, and cloudy with overlying folds, yet diaphanous, a darkness dilute with red.

Silent as a torture-maiden, and as grim, Folter approached to try the filmy thing, scornfully confident that the first sight of it on would prove it unwearable. But Mary judged her scarcely in a mood to be trusted with anything so ethereal; and begged therefore, that, as the dress had of necessity been in many places little more than run together, and she knew its weak points, she might, for that evening, be allowed the privilege of dressing Mrs. Redmain. Hesper gladly consented; Folter left the room; Mary, now at her ease, took her place; and presently, more to Hesper's pleasure than Mary's surprise, for she had made and fixed in her mind the results of minute observation before she went, it was found that the dress fitted quite sufficiently well, and having confined it round the waist with a cincture of thin pale gold, she advanced to her chief anxiety—the head-dress.

For this she had chosen such a doubtful green as the sky appears through yellowish smoke—a sad, lovely colour—the fair past clouded with the present—youth not forgotten, but filmed with age. They were all colours of the evening, as it strives to keep its hold of the heavens, with the night pressing upon it from behind. In front, above the lunar forehead, among the coronal masses, darkly fair, she fixed a diamond star, and over it wound the smoky green like a turbaned vapour wind-ruffled, through which the diamonds gleamed faintly

by fits. Not once would she, while at her work, allow Hesper to look, and the self-willed lady had been submissive in her hands as a child of the chosen; but the moment she found she had succeeded—for her expectations were more than realized—she led her to the cheval-glass.

Hesper gazed for an instant, then turning threw her arms about Mary, and kissed her.

"I don't believe you're a human creature at all!" she cried. "You are a fairy god-mother, come to look after your poor Cinderella, the sport of stupid lady's-maids and dressmakers!"

The door opened, and Folter entered.

"If you please, ma'am, I wish to leave this day month," she said quietly.

"Then," answered her mistress, with equal calmness, "oblige me by going at once to Mrs. Perkin, and telling her that I desire her to pay you a month's wages, and let you leave the house to-morrow morning.—You won't mind helping me to dress till I get another maid—will you, Mary?" she added; and Folter left the room, chagrined at her inability to cause annoyance.

"I do not see why you should have another maid so long as I am with you, ma'am," said Mary. "It should not need many days' apprenticeship to make one woman able to dress another."

"Not when she is like you, Mary," said Hesper. "It is well the wretch has done my hair for to-night, though! That will be the main difficulty."

"It will not be a great one," said Mary, "if you will allow me to undo it when you come home."

"I begin almost to believe in a special providence," said Hesper. "What a blessed thing for me that you

came to drive away that woman! She has been getting worse and worse."

"If I have driven her away," answered Mary, "I am bound to supply her place."

As they talked, she was giving her final touches of arrangement to the head-dress—with which she found it least easy to satisfy herself. It swept round from behind in a misty cloak, the two colours mingling with and gently obscuring each other; while, between them, the palest memory of light, in the golden cincture, helped to bring out the sombre richness, the delicate darkness of the whole.

Searching now again Hesper's jewel-case, Mary found a fine bracelet of the true, the oriental topaz, the old chrysolite—of that clear yellow of the sunset-sky that looks like the 'scaped spirit of miser-smothered gold: this she clasped upon one arm; and when she had fastened a pair of some ancient Mortimer's garnet buckles in her shoes, which she had insisted should be black, and taken off all the rings that Hesper had just put on, except a certain glorious sapphire, she led her again to the mirror; and, if there Hesper was far more pleased with herself than was reasonable or lovely, my reader needs not therefore fear a sermon from the text—"Beauty is only skin-deep," for that text is out of the devil's Bible. No Baal or Astarte is the maker of beauty, but the same who made the seven stars and Orion, and his works are past finding out. If only the woman herself and her worshippers knew how deep it is! But the woman's share in her own beauty may be infinitely less than skin-deep; and there is but one greater fool than the man who worships that beauty—the woman who prides herself upon it, as if she were the fashioner and not the thing fashioned.

But poor Hesper had much excuse, though no justification. She had had many of the disadvantages, and scarce one of the benefits of poverty. She had heard constantly from childhood the most worldly and greedy talk, the commonest expression of abject dependence on the favours of Mammon, and thus had from the first been in preparation for *marrying money*. She had been taught no other way of doing her part to procure the things of which the Father knows we have need. She had never earned a dinner; had never done or thought of doing a day's work—of offering the world anything for the sake of which the world might offer her a shilling to do it again; she had never dreamed of being of any use, even to herself; she had learned to long for money, but had never been hungry, never been cold: she had sometimes felt shabby. Out of it all she had brought but the knowledge that this matter of beauty, with which, by some blessed chance, she was endowed, was worth much precious money in the world's market—worth all the dresses she could ever desire, worth jewels and horses and servants, adoration and adulation—everything in fact the world calls fine, and the devil offers to those who, unscared by his inherent ugliness, will fall down and worship him.

CHAPTER III.

A SCOLDING.

THE Evening Star found herself a success—that is, much followed by the men, and much complimented by the women. Her triumph however did not culminate until the next appearance of the Firefly, containing a song *To the Evening Star*, which *everybody* knew to stand for Mrs. Redmain. The chaos of the uninitiated, indeed, exoteric and despicable, remained in ignorance, nor dreamed that the verses meant anybody of note; to them they seemed but the calf-sigh of some young writer so deep in his first devotion that he jumbled up his ladylove, Hesper, and Aphrodite, in the same poetic bundle—of which he left the string-ends hanging a little loose, while, upon the whole, it remained a not altogether unsightly bit of prentice-work. Tom had not been at the party, but had gathered fire enough from what he heard of Hesper's appearance there, to write the verses. Here they are, as nearly as I can recall them. They are in themselves not worth writing out for the printers, but, in their surroundings, they serve to show Tom, and are the last with which I shall trouble the readers of this narrative.

TO THE EVENING STAR.

From the buried sunlight springing,
Through flame-darken'd, rosy loud,
Native sea-hues with thee bringing,
In the sky thou reignest proud!

Who is like thee, lordly lady,
Star-choragus of the night!
Colour worships, fainting fady,
Night grows darker with delight!

Dusky-radiant, far, and sombre,
In the coolness of thy state,
From my eyelids chasing slumber,
Thou dost smile upon my fate;

Calmly shinest; not a whisper
Of my songs can reach thine ear;
What is it to thee, O Hesper,
That a heart should long or fear?

Tom did not care to show Letty this poem—not that there was anything more in his mind than an artistic admiration of Hesper, and a desire to make himself agreeable in her eyes; but when Letty, having read it, betrayed no shadow of annoyance with its folly, he was a little relieved. The fact was, the simple creature took it as a pardon to herself.

“I am glad you have forgiven me, Tom,” she said.

“What do you mean?” asked Tom.

“For working for Mrs. Redmain with *your* hands,” she said, and breaking into a little laugh, caught his cheeks between those same hands, and reaching up gave him a kiss that made him ashamed of himself—a little, that is, and for the moment, that is: Tom was used to being this or that a little for the moment.

For this same dress, which Tom had thus glorified in song, had been the cause of bitter tears to Letty. He came home *too late* the day of Mary’s visit, but the next morning she told him all about both the first and the second surprise she had had—not, however, with much success in interesting the lordly youth.

"And then," she went on, "what do you think we were doing all the afternoon, Tom?"

"How should I know?" said Tom, indifferently.

"We were working hard at a dress—a dress for a fancy-ball."

"A fancy-ball, Letty? What do you mean? You going to a fancy-ball!"

"Me!" cried Letty, with merry laugh; "no, not quite me. Who do you think it was for?"

"How should I know?" said Tom again, but not quite so indifferently; he was prepared to be annoyed.

"For Mrs. Redmain!" said Letty triumphantly, clapping her hands with delight at what she thought the fun of the thing, for was not Mrs. Redmain Tom's friend?—then stooping a little—it was an unconscious pretty trick she had—and holding them out, palm pressed to palm, with the fingers towards his face.

"Letty," said Tom, frowning—and the frown deepened and deepened; for had he not from the first, if in nothing else, taken trouble to instruct her in what became the wife of Thomas Helmer, Esq.?—"Letty, this won't do!"

Letty was frightened, but tried to think he was only pretending to be displeased.

"Ah! don't frighten me, Tom," she said, with her merry hands now changed to pleading ones, though their position and attitude remained the same.

But he caught them by the wrists in both of his, and held them tight.

"Letty," he said once more, and with increased severity, "this won't do. I tell you, it won't do."

"What won't do, Tom?" she returned, growing white. "There's no harm done."

"Yes, there is," said Tom, with solemnity; "there is harm done, when *my* wife goes and does like that. What

would people say of *me*, if they were to come to know—God forbid they should!—that your husband was talking all the evening to ladies at whose dresses his wife had been working all the afternoon!—You don't know what you are doing, Letty. What do you suppose the ladies would think if they were to hear of it?"

Poor, foolish Tom, ignorant in his folly, did not know how little those grand ladies would have cared if his wife had been a charwoman: the eyes of such are not discerning of fine social distinctions in women who are not of their set, neither are the family relations of the bohemians they invite, of the smallest consequence to them.

"But, Tom," pleaded his wife, "such a grand lady as that! one you go and read your poetry to! What harm can there be in your poor little wife helping to make a dress for a lady like that?"

"I tell you, Letty, I don't choose *my* wife to do such a thing for the greatest lady in the land! Good heavens! if it *were* to come to the ears of the staff! It would be the ruin of me! I should never hold up my head again!"

By this time Letty's head was hanging low, like a flower half broken from its stem, and two big tears were slowly rolling down her cheeks. But there was a gleam of satisfaction in her heart notwithstanding. Tom thought so much of his little wife that he would not have her work for the greatest lady in the land! She did not see that it was not pride in her, but pride in himself, that made him indignant at the idea. It was not "*my wife*," but "*my* wife" with Tom. She looked again up timidly in his face, and said, her voice trembling, and her cheeks wet, for she could not wipe away the tears, because Tom still held her hands as one might those of a naughty child—

"But, Tom! I don't exactly see how you can make so much of it, when you don't think me—when you know I am not fit to go among such people."

To this Tom had no reply at hand: he was not yet far enough down the devil's turnpike to be able to tell his wife that she had spoken the truth—that he did not think her fit for such company; that he would be ashamed of her in it; that she had no style; that instead of carrying herself as if she knew herself somebody—as good as anybody there indeed, being the wife of Tom Helmer—she had the meek look of one who knew herself nobody, and did not know her husband to be anybody. He did not think how little he had done to give the unassuming creature that quiet confidence which a woman ought to gather from the assurance of her husband's satisfaction in her, and the consciousness of being, in dress and everything else, pleasing in his eyes, therefore of occupying the only place in the world she desires to have. But he did think that Letty's next question might naturally be, "Why do you not take me with you?" No doubt he could have answered, no one had ever asked her; but then she might rejoin, had he ever put it in any one's way to ask her? It might even occur to her to inquire whether he had told Mrs. Redmain that he had a wife! and he had heart enough left to imagine it might mortally hurt her to find he lived a life so utterly apart from her's—that she had so little of the relations though all the rights of wifeness. It was no wonder therefore if he was more than willing to change the subject. He let the poor imprisoned hands drop so abruptly, that, in their abandonment, they fell straight from her shoulders to her sides.

"Well, well, child!" he said; "put on your bonnet, and we shall be in time for the first piece at the Lyceum."

Letty flew, and was ready in five minutes. She could dress the more quickly that she was delayed by little doubt as to what she had better wear: she had scarcely a choice. Tom, looking after his own comforts, left her to look after her necessities; and she, having a conscience, and not much spirit, went even shabbier than she yet needed.

CHAPTER IV.

SEPIA.

As naturally as if she had been born to that very duty and no other, Mary slid into the office of lady's-maid to Mrs. Redmain, feeling in it, although for reasons very different, no more degradation than her mistress saw in it. If Hesper was occasionally a little rude to her, Mary was not one to *accept* a rudeness—that is, to wrap it up in resentment, and put it away safe in the pocket of memory. She could not help feeling things of the kind—sometimes with indignation and anger; but she made haste to send them from her, and shut the doors against them. She knew herself a far more blessed creature than Hesper, and felt the obligation, from the Master himself, of so enduring as to keep every channel of service open between Hesper and her. To Hesper, the change from the vulgar service of Folter to the ministration of Mary, was like passing from a shallow purgatory to a gentle paradise. Mary's service was full of live and near presence, as that of dew or summer wind; Folter handled her as if she were dressing a doll, Mary as if she were dressing a baby; her hands were deft as an angel's, her feet as noiseless as swift. And to have

Mary near was not only to have a ministering spirit at hand, but to have a good atmosphere all around—an air, a heaven, out of which good things must momentarily come. Few could be closely associated with her and not become aware at least of the capacity of being better, if not of the desire to be better.

In the matter of immediate result, it was a transition from decoration to dress. If in any sense Hesper was well-dressed before, she was in every sense well-dressed now—dressed so, that is, as to reveal the nature, the analogies, and the associations of her beauty: no manner of dressing can make a woman look more beautiful than she is, though many a mode may make her look less so.

There was one in the house, however, who was not pleased at the change from Folter to Mary: Sepia found herself in consequence less necessary to Hesper. Hitherto Hesper had never been satisfied without Sepia's opinion and final approval in that weightiest of affairs, the matter of dress; but she found in Mary such a faculty as rendered appeal to Sepia unnecessary; for she not only satisfied her idea of herself, and how she would choose to look, but showed her taste as much surer than Sepia's as Sepia's was readier than Hesper's own. Sepia was equal to the dressing of herself—she never blundered there; but there was little dependence to be placed upon her in dressing another. She cared for herself, not for another; and to dress another, love is needful—love, the only true artist—love, the only opener of eyes. She cared nothing to minister to the comfort or beautification of her cousin, and her displeasure did not arise from the jealousy that is born of affection. So far as Hesper's self was concerned, Sepia did not care a straw whether she was well or ill dressed; but if the link between them of dress was severed, what other so strong would be left? And

to find herself in any way a less object in Hesper's eyes, would be to find herself on the inclined plane of loss, and probable ruin.

Another, though a smaller point, was that hitherto she had generally been able so to dress Hesper as to make of her more or less a foil to herself. My reader may remember that there was between Hesper and Sepia, if not a resemblance, yet a relation of appearance, like, vaguely, that between the twilight and the night: seen in certain positions and circumstances, the one would recall the other; and it was therefore a matter of no small consequence to Sepia, that the relation of her dress to Hesper's should be such as to give herself any advantage to be derived in it from the relation of their looks. This was far more difficult, of course, when she had no longer a voice in the matter of Hesper's dress, and when the loving skill of the new maid presented her rival to her individual best. Mary would have been glad to help her as well, but Sepia drew back as from a hostile nature, and they made no approximation. This was more loss to Sepia than she knew, for Mary would have assisted her in doing the best when she had no money, a condition which often made it the more trying that she had now so little influence over her cousin's adornment. To dress was a far more difficult, though not more important affair, with Sepia than with Hesper, for she had nothing of her own, and from her cousin no fixed allowance. Any arrangement of the kind had been impossible at Durnmelling, where there was no money; and here, where it would have been easy enough, she judged it better to give no hint in its direction, although plainly it had never suggested itself to Hesper. There was nothing of the money-mean in her, any more than in her husband. They were, of course, as became people of fashion, regular and

unwearied attendants of the church of Mammon, ordering all their judgments and ways in accordance with the precepts there delivered; but they were none of Mammon's priests or pew-openers, money-grubs, or accumulators. They gave liberally where they gave, and scraped no inferior to spend either on themselves or their charities. They had plenty, it is true; but so have many who withhold more than is meet, and take the ewe lamb to add to their flock. For one thing, they had no time for that sort of wickedness, and took no interest in it. So Hesper, although it had not come into her mind to give her the ease of a stated allowance, behaved generously to Sepia—when she thought of it; but she did not love her enough to be love-watchful, and seldom thought how her money must be going, or questioned whether she might not at the moment be in want of more. There are many who will give freely, who do not care to understand need and anticipate want. Hence at times Sepia's purse would be long empty before the giving-thought would wake in the mind of Hesper. When it woke, it was gracious and free.

Had Sepia ventured to run up bills with the tradespeople, Hesper would have taken it as a thing of course, and settled them with her own. But Sepia had a certain politic pride in spending only what was given her; also she saw or thought she saw serious reason for avoiding all appearance of taking liberties: from the first of Mr. Redmain's visits to Durnmelling, she had been aware, with an instinct keen in respect of its objects, though blind as to its own nature, that he did not like her, and soon satisfied herself that any overt attempt to please him, would but ripen his dislike to repugnance; and her dread was that he might make it a condition with Mr. Mortimer that Hesper's intimacy with her should cease;

whereas, if once they were married, the husband's disfavour would, she believed, only strengthen the wife's predilection. Having so far gained her end, it remained, however, almost as desirable as before, that she should do nothing to fix or increase his dislike—nay, that, if within the possible, she should become pleasing to him. Did not even hate turn sometimes to its mighty opposite? But she understood so little of the man with whom she had to deal, that her calculations were ill-founded.

She was right in believing that Mr. Redmain disliked her, but she was wrong in imagining that he had therefore any objection to her being for the present in the house. He certainly did not relish the idea of her continuing to be his wife's inseparable companion, but there would be time enough to get rid of her after he had found her out. For she had not long been one of his *family*, before he knew, with insight unerring, that she had to be found out, and was therefore an interesting subject for the exercise of his faculty of moral analysis. He was certain her history was composed mainly of secrets. As yet, however, he had discovered nothing.

I must just remind my reader of the intellectual passion I have already mentioned as characterizing Mr. Redmain's mental constitution. His faults and vices were by no means peculiar; but the bent to which I refer, certainly no virtue, and springing originally from predominant evil, was in no small degree peculiar, especially in the degree to which, derived as it was from his father, he had in his own being developed it. Most men, he judged with himself, were such fools as well as rogues, that there was not the least occasion to ask what they were after: they did but turn themselves inside out before you! But, on the other hand, there were not a few who took pains, more or less successful, to conceal their game of life;

and such it was the delight of his being to lay bare to his own eyes—not to those of other people; that, he said, would be to spoil his game! Men were his library, he said—his history, his novels, his sermons, his philosophy, his poetry, his whole literature—and he did not like to have his books thumbed by other people. Human nature, in its countless aspects, was all about him, he said, every mask crying to him to take it off. Unhappily, it was but the morbid anatomy of human nature he cared to study. For all his abuse of it, he did not yet recognize it as morbid, but took it as normal, and the best to be had. No doubt he therein judged and condemned himself, but that he never thought of—nor, perceived, would it have been a point of any consequence to him.

From the first he saw through Mr. Mortimer, and all belonging to him, except Miss Yolland: she soon began to puzzle—and so far to please him, though, as I have said, he did not like her. Had he been a younger man, she would have captivated him; as it was, she would have repelled him entirely, but that she offered him a good subject. He said to himself that she was a bad lot, but what sort of a bad lot was not so clear as to make her devoid of interest to him: he must discover how she played her life-game: she had a history, and he would fain know it. As I have said, however, so far it had come to nothing, for, upon the surface, Sepia showed herself merely like any other worldly girl who knows “on which side her bread is buttered.”

The moment he had found, or believed he had found what there was to know about her, he was sure to hate her heartily.

For some time after his marriage, he appeared at his wife's parties oftener than he otherwise would have done, just for the sake of having an eye upon Sepia; but had

seen nothing, nor the shadow of anything—until one night, by the merest chance, happening to enter his wife's drawing-room, he caught a peculiar glance between Sepia and a young man—not very young, who had just entered, and whom he had not seen before.

To not a few it seemed strange that, with her unquestioned powers of fascination, she had not yet married; but London is not the only place in which poverty is as repellent as beauty is attractive. At the same time it must be confessed there was something about her which made not a few men shy of her. Some found that if her eyes drew them within a certain distance, there they began to repel them, they could not tell why. Others felt strangely uncomfortable in her presence from the first. Not only much that a person has done, but much of what a person is capable of, is, I suspect, written on the bodily presence; and although no human eye is capable of reading more than here and there a scattered hint of the twilight of history, which is the aurora of prophecy, the soul may yet shudder with an instinctive foreboding it cannot explain, and feel the presence, without recognizing the nature of the hostile.

Sepia's eyes were her great power. She knew the laws of mortar-practice in that kind as well as any officer of engineers those of projectiles. There was something about her engines which it were vain to attempt to describe. Their lightest glance was a thing not to be trifled with, and their gaze a thing hardly to be withstood. Sustained and without hurt defied, it could hardly be by man or woman born. They were large, but no fool would be taken with mere size. They were as dark as ever eyes of woman, but our older poets delighted in eyes as grey as glass: certainly not in their darkness lay their peculiar witchery. They were grandly proportioned, neither

almond-shaped nor round, neither prominent nor deep-set; but even shape by itself is not much. If I go on to say they were luminous, plainly there the danger begins. Sepia's eyes, I confess, were not lords of the deepest light—for she was not true; but neither was theirs a surface light, generated of merely physical causes: through them, concentrating her will upon their utterance, she could establish a psychical contact with *almost* any man she chose. Their power was an evil selfish shadow of original, universal love. By them she could produce at once in the man on whom she turned their play, a sense as it were of some primordial, fatal affinity between her and him—of an aboriginal understanding, the rare possession of but a few of the pairs made male and female. Into those eyes she would call up her soul, and there make it sit, flashing light, in gleams and sparkles, shoots and coruscations—not from great black pupils alone—to whose size there were who said the suicidal belladonna lent its aid—but from great dark irids as well;—nay, from eye-balls, eye-lashes, and eye-lids, as from spiritual catapult or culverin, would she dart the lightnings of her present soul, invading with influence as irresistible as subtle, the soul of the man she chose to assail, who, thenceforward, for a season, if he were such as she took him for, scarce had choice but be her slave. She seldom exerted their full force, however, without some further motive than mere desire to captivate. There are women who fly their falcons at any game, little birds and all; but Sepia did not so waste herself: her quarry must be worth her hunt: she must either love him, or need him. *Love!* did I say? Alas, if ever holy word was put to unholy use, *love* is that word! When Diana goes to hell, her name changes to Hecate, but love among the devils is called love still!

In more than one other country, whatever might be the cause, Sepia had found *the men* less shy of her than here; and she had almost begun to think her style was not generally pleasing to English eyes. Whether this had anything to do with the fact that now in London she began to amuse herself with Tom Helmer, I cannot say with certainty; but almost if not quite the first time they met, that morning, namely, when first he called, and they sat in the bay window of the drawing-room in Glammis Square, she brought her eyes to play upon him; and although he addressed the Firefly poem to Hesper in the hope of pleasing her, it was for the sake of Sepia chiefly that he desired the door of her house to be an open one to him. Whether at that time she knew he was a married man, it is hardly necessary to inquire, seeing it would have made no difference whatever to one like her, whose design was only to amuse herself with the youth, and possibly to make of him a screen. She went so far, however, as to allow him, when there was opportunity, to draw her into quiet corners, and even to linger when the other guests were gone, and he had had his full share of champagne. Once indeed they remained together so long in the little conservatory, lighted only by an alabaster lamp, pale as the moon in the dawning, that she had to unbolt the door to let him out. This did not take place without coming to the knowledge of both Mr. and Mrs. Redmain; but the former was only afraid there was nothing in it, and was far from any wish to control her; and Sepia herself was the informant of the latter. To her she would make game of her foolish admirer, telling how, on this and that occasion, it was all she could do to get rid of him.

CHAPTER V.

HONOUR.

HAVING now gained a partial insight into Letty's new position, Mary pondered what she could do to make life more of life to her. Not many knew better than she that the only true way to help a human heart is to lift it up; but she knew also that every kind of loving aid tends more or less to that uplifting; and that, if we cannot do the great thing, we must be ready to do the small: if we do not help in little things, how shall we be judged fit to help in greater? We must help where we can, that we may help where we cannot. The first, and the only thing she could for a time think of, was, to secure for Letty, if possible, a share in her husband's pleasures.

Quietly, yet swiftly, a certain peaceful familiarity had established itself between Hesper and Mary, to which the perfect balance of the latter, and her sense of the only true foundation of her position, contributed far more than the undefined partiality of the former. The possibility of such a conversation as I am now going to set down, was one of the results.

"Do you like Mr. Helmer, ma'am?" asked Mary one morning, as she was brushing her hair.

"Very well. How do you know anything of him?"

"Not many people within ten miles of Testbridge do not know Mr. Helmer," answered Mary.

"Yes, yes, I remember," said Hesper. "He used to ride about on a long-legged horse, and talk to anybody

that would listen to him. But there was always something pleasing about him, and he is much improved. Do you know he is considered really very clever?"

"I am not surprised," rejoined Mary. "He used to be rather foolish, and that is a sign of cleverness—at least many clever people are foolish, I think."

"*You* can't have had much opportunity for making the observation, Mary!"

"Clever people think as much of themselves in the country as they do in London, and that is what makes them foolish," returned Mary. "But I used to think Mr. Helmer had very good points, and was worth doing something for—if one only knew what."

"He does not seem to want anything done for him," said Hesper.

"I know one thing *you* could do for him, and it would be no trouble," said Mary.

"I will do anything for anybody that is no trouble," answered Hesper. "I should like to know something that is no trouble."

"It is only, the next time you ask him, to ask his wife," said Mary.

"He is married then?" returned Hesper with indifference. "Is the woman presentable? Some shopkeeper's daughter, I suppose!"

Mary laughed.

"You don't imagine the son of a lawyer would be likely to marry a shopkeeper's daughter!" she said.

"Why not?" returned Hesper, with a look of non-intelligence.

"Because a professional man is so far above a tradesman."

"Oh!" said Hesper. "—But he should have told me if he wanted to bring his wife with him. I don't care

who she is, so long as she dresses decently and holds her tongue.—What are you laughing at, Mary?”

Hesper called it laughing, but Mary was only smiling.

“I can’t help being amused,” answered Mary, “that you should think it such an out-of-the-way thing to be a shopkeeper’s daughter, and here am I all the time, feeling quite comfortable, and proud of the shopkeeper whose daughter I am.”

“Oh! I beg your pardon,” exclaimed Hesper, growing hot, for, I almost believe, the first time in her life, and therein, I fear, showing a drop of bad blood from somewhere, probably her father’s side of the creation; for not even the sense of having hurt the feelings of an inferior, can make the thorough-bred woman of the world aware of the least discomfort; and here was Hesper, not only feeling like a woman of God’s making, but actually showing it!—“How cruel of me!” she went on. “But you see, I never think of you—when I am talking to you—as—as one of that class!”

Mary laughed outright this time: she was amused, and thought it better to show it, for that would show also she was not hurt. Hesper, however, put it down to insensibility.

“Surely, dear Mrs. Redmain,” said Mary, “you cannot think the class to which I belong in itself so objectionable, that it is rude to refer to it in my hearing?”

“I am very sorry,” repeated Hesper, but in a tone of some offence: it was one thing to confess a fault; another to be regarded as actually guilty of the fault. “Nothing was farther from my intention than to offend you. I have not a doubt that shopkeepers are a most respectable class in their way,—”

“Excuse me, dear Mrs. Redmain,” said Mary again, “but you quite mistake me. I am not in the least

offended. I don't care what you think of the class. There are a great many shopkeepers who are anything but respectable—as bad indeed as any of the nobility.”

“I was not thinking of morals,” answered Hesper. “In that, I daresay, all classes are pretty much alike. But of course there are differences.”

“Perhaps one of them is, that, in our class, we make respectability more a question of the individual than you do in yours.”

“That may be very true,” returned Hesper. “So long as a man behaves himself, we ask no questions.”

“Will you let me tell you how the thing looks to me?” said Mary.

“Certainly. You do not suppose I care for the opinions of the people about me! I too have my way of looking at things.”

So said Hesper; yet it was just the opinions of the people about her that ruled all those of her actions that could be said to be ruled at all. No one boasts of freedom except the willing slave—the man so utterly a slave, that he feels nothing irksome in his fetters. Yet perhaps but for the opinions of those about her, Hesper would have been worse than she was.

“Am I right, then, in thinking,” began Mary, “that people of your class care only that a man should wear the look of a gentleman, and carry himself like one?—that whether his appearance be a reality or a mask, you do not care, so long as no mask is removed in your company?—that he may be the lowest of men, but so long as other people receive him, you will too, counting him good enough?”

Hesper held her peace. She had by this time learned some facts concerning the man she had married which, beside Mary's question, were embarrassing.

"It is interesting," she said at length, "to know how the different classes in a country regard each other." But she spoke wearily: it was interesting in the abstract, not interesting to her.

"The way to try a man," said Mary, "would be to turn him the other way, as I saw the gentleman who is taking your portrait do yesterday trying a square—change his position quite, I mean, and mark how far he continued to look a true man. He would show something of his real self then, I think. Make a nobleman a shopkeeper, for instance, and see what kind of a shopkeeper he made. If he showed himself just as honourable when a shopkeeper, as he had seemed when a nobleman, there would be good reason for counting him an honourable man."

"What odd fancies you have, Mary!" said Hesper, yawning.

"I know my father would have been as honourable as a nobleman, as he was when a shopkeeper," persisted Mary.

"That I can well believe—he was your father," said Hesper kindly, meaning what she said too, so far as her poor understanding of the honourable reached.

"Would you mind telling me," asked Mary, "how you would define the difference between a nobleman and a shopkeeper?"

Hesper thought a little. The question to her was a stupid one. She had never had interest enough in humanity to care a straw what any shopkeeper ever thought or felt. Such people inhabited a region so far below her, as to be practically out of her sight. They were not of her kind. It had never occurred to her that life must look to them much as it looked to her; that, like Shylock, they had feelings, and would bleed if cut with a knife.

But, although she was not interested, she peered about sleepily for an answer. Her thoughts, in a lazy fashion, tumbled in her, like waves without wind—which indeed was all the sort of thinking she knew. At last, with the decision of conscious superiority, and the judicial air afforded by the precision of utterance belonging to her class—a precision so strangely conjoined with the lack of truth and logic both—she said, in a tone that gave to the merest puerility the consequence of a judgment between contending sages,—

“The difference is, that the nobleman is born to ease and dignity and affluence, and the—shopkeeper to buy and sell for his living.”

“Many a nobleman,” suggested Mary, “buys and sells without the necessity of making a living.”

“That is the difference,” said Hesper.

“Then the nobleman buys and sells to make money, and the shopkeeper to make a living?”

“Yes,” granted Hesper lazily.

“Which is the nobler end—to live, or to make money?”

But this question was too far beyond Hesper. She did not even choose to hear it.

“*And*,” she said, resuming her definition instead, “the nobleman deals with great things, the shopkeeper with small.”

“When things are finally settled,” said Mary,—

“Gracious, Mary!” cried Hesper, “what do you mean? Are not things settled for good this many a century? I am afraid I have been harbouring an awful Radical!—a—what do they call it?—a communist!”

She would have turned the whole matter out of doors, for she was tired of it.

“Things hardly look as if they were going to remain

just as they are at this precise moment," said Mary. "How could they, when, from the very making of the world, they have been going on changing and changing, hardly ever even seeming to stand still!"

"You frighten me, Mary! You will do something terrible in my house, and I shall get the blame of it!" said Hesper, laughing.

But she did in truth feel a little uncomfortable. The shadow of dismay, a formless apprehension overclouded her. Mary's words recalled sentiments which at home she had heard alluded to with horror; and, however little parents may be loved or respected by their children, their opinions will yet settle, and, until they are driven out by better or worse, will cling.

"When I tell you what I was really thinking of, you will not be alarmed at my opinions," said Mary, not laughing now, but smiling a deep, sweet smile: "I do not believe there ever will be any settlement of things but one; they cannot and must not stop changing, until the kingdom of heaven is come. Into that they must change, and rest."

"You are leaving politics for religion now, Mary. That is the one fault I have to find with you—you won't keep things in their own places! You are always mixing them up—like that Mrs.—what's her name?—who will mix religion and love in her novels, though everybody tells her they have nothing to do with each other! It is so irreverent!"

"Is it irreverent to believe that God rules the world he made, and that he is bringing things to his own mind in it?"

"You can't persuade me religion means turning things upside down."

"It means that a good deal more than people think.

Did not our Lord say that many that are first shall be last, and the last first?"

"What has that to do with this nineteenth century?"

"Perhaps that the honourable shopkeeper and the mean nobleman will one day change places."

"Oh," thought Hesper, "that is why the lower classes take so to religion!" But what she said was:—"Oh, yes, I daresay! But everything then will be so different that it won't signify. When we are all angels, nobody will care who is first, and who is last. I'm sure, for one, it won't be anything to me."

Hesper was a tolerable attendant at church—I will not say whether high or low church, because I should be supposed to care.

"In the kingdom of heaven," answered Mary, "things will always look what they are. My father used to say people will grow their own dresses there, as surely as a leopard his spots. He had to do with dresses, you know. There, not only will an honourable man look honourable, but a mean or less honourable man must look what he is."

"There will be nobody mean there."

"Then a good many won't be there who are called honourable here."

"I have no doubt there will be a good deal of allowance made for some people," said Hesper. "Society makes such demands!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE INVITATION.

WHEN Letty received Mrs. Redmain's card, inviting her with her husband to an evening party, it raised in her a bewildered flutter—of pleasure, of fear, of pride, of shyness, of dismay: how dared she show her face in such a grand assembly! She would not know a bit how to behave herself! But it was impossible, for she had no dress fit to go anywhere! What would Tom say if she looked a dowdy? He would be ashamed of her, and she dared not think what might come of it!

But close upon the postman came Mary, and a long talk followed. Letty was full of trembling delight, but Mary was not a little anxious with herself how Tom would take it.

The first matter, however, was Letty's dress. She had no money, and seemed afraid to ask for any. The distance between her and her husband had been widening.

Their council of ways and means lasted a good while, including many digressions. At last, though unwillingly, Letty accepted Mary's proposal that a certain dress, her best indeed, though she did not say so, which she had scarcely worn, and was not likely to miss, should be made to fit Letty. It was a lovely black silk, the best her father had been able to choose for her the last time he was in London. A little pang did shoot through her heart at the thought of parting with it, but she had too much of that father in her not to know that the greatest honour that can be shown any *thing*, is to make it serve a *person*; that the dearest gift of love, withheld from

human necessity, is handed over to the moth and the rust. But little idea had Letty, much as she appreciated her kindness, what a sacrifice Mary was making for her that she might look her own sweet self, and worthy of her renowned Tom!

When Tom came home that night, however, the look of the world and all that is in it changed speedily for Letty, and terribly. He arrived in great goodhumour—somebody had been praising his verses, and the joy of the praise overflowed on his wife. But when, pleased as any little girl with the prospect of a party and a new frock, she told him, with gleeful gratitude, of the invitation and the heavenly kindness which had rendered it possible for her to accept it, the countenance of the great man changed. He rejected the idea of her going with him to any gathering of his grand friends—objected most of all to her going to Mrs. Redmain's. Alas! he had begun to allow to himself that he had married in too great haste—and beneath him. Wherever he went his wife could be no credit to him, and her presence would take from him all sense of liberty! Not choosing, however, to acknowledge either of these objections, and not willing, besides, to appear selfish in the eyes of the woman who had given herself to him, he was only too glad to put all upon another, to him equally genuine ground. Controlling his irritation for the moment, he set forth with lordly kindness the absolute impossibility of accepting such an offer as Mary's. Could she for a moment imagine, he said, that he would degrade himself by taking his wife out in a dress that was not her own?

Here Letty interrupted him.

"Mary has given me the dress," she sobbed, "—for my very own."

"A second-hand dress! A dress that has been worn!"

cried Tom. "How could you dream of insulting me so! The thing is absolutely impossible. Why, Letty, just think!—There should I be, going about as if the house were my own, and there would be my wife in the next room, or perhaps at my elbow, dressed in the finery of the lady's-maid of the house! It won't bear thinking of! I declare it makes me so ashamed, as I lie here, that I feel my face quite hot in the dark! To have to reason about such a thing—with my own wife too!"

"It's not finery," sobbed Letty, laying hold of the one fact within her reach; "it's a beautiful black silk."

"It matters not a straw what it is," persisted Tom, adding humbug to cruelty. "You would be nothing but a sham!—A live dishonesty! A jackdaw in peacock's feathers!—I am sorry, Letty, your own sense of truth and uprightness should not prevent even the passing desire to act such a lie. Your fine dress would be just a fine fib—yourself would be but a walking fib. I have been taking too much for granted with you: I must bring you no more novels. A volume or two of Carlyle is what *you* want."

This was too much. To lose her novels and her new dress together, and be threatened with nasty moral medicine—for she had never read a word of Carlyle beyond his translation of that dream of Richter's, and imagined him dry as a sandpit—was bad enough, but to be so reproved by her husband was more than she could bear. If she was a silly and ignorant creature, she had the heart of a woman-child; and that precious thing in the sight of God, wounded and bruised by the husband in whom lay all her pride, went on beating laboriously for him only. She did not blame him. Anything was better than that. The dear, simple soul had a horror of rebuke. It would break hedges and climb stone walls to get out

of the path of judgment—ten times more eagerly if her husband were the judge. She wept and wailed like a sick child, until at length the hard heart of selfish Tom was touched, and he sought, after the fashion of a foolish mother, to read the inconsolable a lesson of wisdom. But the truer a heart, the harder it is to console with the false. By and by, however, sleep, the truest of things, did for her what even the blandishments of her husband could not.

When she woke in the morning, he was gone: he had thought of an emendation in a poem that had been *set up* the day before, and made haste to the office, lest it should be printed without the precious betterment.

Mary came before noon, and found sadness where she had left joy. When she had heard as much as Letty thought proper to tell her, she was filled with indignation, and her first thought was to compass the tyrant's own exclusion from the paradise whose gates he closed against his wife. But second thoughts are sometimes best, and she saw the next moment not only that punishment did not belong to her, but that the weight of such would fall on Letty. The sole thing she could think of to comfort her was, to ask her to spend the same evening with her in her room. The proposal brightened Letty up at once: sometime or other in the course of the evening she would, she fancied, see, or at least catch a glimpse of Tom in his glory!

The evening came, and with beating heart Letty went up the back stairs to Mary's room. She was dressing her mistress, but did not keep her waiting long. She had provided tea beforehand, and when Mrs. Redmain had gone down, the two friends had a pleasant while together. Mary took Letty to Mrs. Redmain's room while she put away her things, and there showed her many splendours,

which, moving no envy in her simple heart, yet make her sad, thinking of Tom. As she passed to the drawing-room, Sepia looked in, and saw them together.

But as the company kept arriving, Letty grew very restless. She could not talk of anything for two minutes together, but kept creeping out of the room and half-way down the stair, to look over the banister-rail, and have a bird's-eye peep of a portion of the great landing, where indeed she caught many a glimpse of beauty and state, but never a glimpse of her Tom. Alas! she could not even imagine herself near him. What she saw made her feel as if her idol were miles away, and she could never draw nigh him again. How should the familiar associate of such splendid creatures care a pin's point for his humdrum wife?

Worn out at last, and thoroughly disappointed, she wanted to go home. It was then past midnight. Mary went with her, and saw her safe in bed before she left her.

As she went up to her room on her return, she saw, through the door by which the gardener entered the conservatory, Sepia standing there, and Tom, with flushed face, talking to her eagerly.

Letty cried herself to sleep, and dreamed that Tom had disowned her before a great company of grand ladies, who mocked her from their sight.

Tom came home while she slept, and in the morning was cross and miserable—in part, because he had been so abominably selfish to her. But the moment that, half frightened, half hopeful, she told him where she was the night before, he broke into the worst anger he had ever yet shown her. His shameful pride could not brook the idea that where he was a guest, his wife was entertained by one of the domestics!

"How dare you be guilty of such a disgraceful thing!" he cried.

"Oh, don't, Tom—dear Tom!" pleaded Letty in terror. "It was you I wanted to see—not the great people, Tom. I don't care if I never see one of them again."

"Why should you ever see one of them again, I should like to know! What are they to you, or you to them?"

"But you know I was asked to go, Tom!"

"You're not such a fool as to fancy they cared about you! Everybody knows they are the most heartless set of people in the world!"

"Then why do you go, Tom?" said Letty innocently.

"That's quite another thing! A man has to cultivate connections his wife need not know anything about. It is one of the necessities laid on my position."

Letty supposed it all truer than it was either intelligible or pleasant, and said no more, but let poor, self-abused, fine-fellow Tom scold and argue and reason away till he was tired. She was not sullen, but bewildered and worn out. He got up, and left her without a word.

Even at the risk of hurt to his dignity, of which there was no danger from the presence of his sweet, modest little wife in the best of company, it had been well for Tom to have allowed Letty the pleasure within her reach; for that night Sepia's artillery played on him ruthlessly. It may have been merely for her amusement—time, you see, moves so slowly with such as have no necessities they must themselves supply, and recognize no duties they must perform: without those two main pillars of life, necessity and duty, how shall the temple stand, when the huge weary Samson comes tugging at it? The

wonder is there is not a great deal more wickedness in the world. For listlessness and boredom and nothing-to-do-ness are the best of soils for the breeding of the worms that never stop gnawing. Anyhow, Sepia had flashed on Tom, the tinder of Tom's heart had responded, and any day when Sepia chose, she might blow up a wicked as well as foolish flame; nor, if it should suit her purpose, was Sepia one to hesitate in the use of the fire-fan. All the way home, her eyes haunted him, and it is a more dreadful thing than most are aware to be haunted by anything, good or bad, except the being who is our life. And those eyes, though not good, were beautiful. Evil, it is true, has neither part nor lot in beauty; it is absolutely hostile to it, and will at last destroy it utterly; but the process is a long one, so long that many imagine badness and beauty vitally associable. Tom yielded to the haunting, and it was in part the fault of those eyes that he used such hard words to his wife in the morning. Wives have not seldom to suffer sorely for discomforts and wrongs in their husbands of which they know nothing. But the thing will be set right one day, and in a better fashion than if all the woman's-rights' committees in the world had their will of the matter.

About this time, from the top, left-hand corner of the last page of the Firefly, it appeared that Twilight had given place to Night; for the first of many verses began to show themselves, in which Twilight, or Hesper, or Vesper, or the Evening Star, was no more once mentioned, but only and always Nox, or Hecate, or the dark Diana. *Tenebrious* was a great word with Tom about this time. He was very fond also of the word *interlunar*. I will not trouble my reader with any specimen of the outcome of Tom's new inspiration, partly for this reason, that the verses not unfrequently came so near being

good, nay, sometimes were really so good, that I do not choose to set them down where they would be treated with a mockery they do not in themselves deserve. He did not direct his wife's attention to them, nor did he compose them either at home or at the office. Mostly he wrote them between acts at the theatre, or in any public place where something in which he was not interested was going on.

Of all that read them, and here was a Nemesis awful in justice, there was not one less moved by them than she who had inspired them. She saw in them, it is true, a reflex of her own power—and that pleased, but it did not move her. She took the devotion and pocketed it, as a greedy boy might an orange or bull's-eye. The verses in which Tom delighted, were but the merest noise in the ears of the lady to whom of all he would have had them acceptable. One momentary revelation as to how she regarded them, would have been enough to release him from his foolish enthrallment. Indignation, chagrin, and mortification would have soon been the death of such poor love as Tom's.

Mary and Sepia were on terms of politeness—of readiness to help on the one side, and condescension upon the other. Sepia would have condescended to the Mother Mary. The pure human was an idea beyond her, as beyond most people. They have not enough religion towards God to know there is such a thing as *religion* towards their neighbour. But Sepia never made an enemy—if she could help it. She could not afford the luxury of hating—openly, at least. But I imagine she would have hated Mary heartily could she have seen the way she regarded her—the look of pitiful love, of compassionate and waiting helpfulness which her soul would now and then cast upon her. Of all things she would have re-

sented pity; and she took Mary's readiness to help for servility—and naturally, seeing in herself willingness came from nothing else, though she called it prudence, and necessity, and knew no shame because of it. Her children justify the heavenly wisdom, but the worldly wisdom justifies her children. Mary could not but feel how Sepia regarded her service, but service, to be true, must be divine, that is, to the just and the unjust, like the sun and the rain.

Between Sepia and Mr. Redmain continued a distance too great for either difference or misunderstanding. They met with a cold good-morning, and parted without any good-night. Their few words were polite, and their demeanour was civil. At the breakfast-table, Sepia would silently pass things to Mr. Redmain; Mr. Redmain would thank her, but never troubled himself to do as much for her. His attentions, indeed, were seldom wasted at home; but he was not often rude to anybody save his wife and his man, except when he was ill.

It was a long time before he began to feel any interest in Mary. He knew nothing of her save as a nice-looking maid his wife had got—rather a prim-looking puss, he would have said, had he had occasion to describe her. What Mary knew of him was merely the reflection of him in the mind of his wife; but the first time she saw him, she felt she would rather not have to speak to him.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRAY SOUND.

MARY went to see Letty as often as she could, and that was not seldom; but she had scarcely a chance of seeing Tom; either he was not up, or had gone—to the office, Letty supposed: she had no more idea of where the office was, or of the other localities haunted by Tom, than he himself had of what spirit he was of.

One day when Mary could not help remarking upon her pale, weary looks, Letty burst into tears, and confided to her a secret of which she was not the less proud, that it caused her anxiety and fear. As soon as she began to talk about it, the joy of its hope began to predominate, and before Mary left her, she might have seemed to a stranger the most blessed little creature in the world. The greatness of her delight made Mary sad for her. To any thoughtful heart it must be sad to think what a little time the joy of so many mothers lasts—not because their babies die, but because they live; but Mary's mournfulness was caused by the fear that the splendid dawn of mother-hope would soon be swallowed in dismal clouds of father-fault. For mothers and for wives there is no redemption, no unchaining of love, save by the coming of the kingdom—in *themselves*. Oh! why do not mothers, sore-hearted mothers at least, if none else on the face of the earth, rush to the feet of the son of Mary?

Yet every birth is but another link in the golden chain by which the world shall be lifted to the feet of God. It is only by the birth of new children, ever fresh

material for the creative Spirit of the Son of Man to work upon, that the world can finally be redeemed. Letty had no *ideas* about children, only the usual instincts of appropriation and indulgence; Mary had a few, for she recalled with delight some of her father's ways with herself. Him she knew as, next to God, the source of her life, so well had he fulfilled that first duty of all parents—the transmission of life. About such things she tried to talk to Letty, but soon perceived that not a particle of her thought found its way into Letty's mind: she cared nothing for any duty concerned—only for the joy of being a mother.

She grew paler yet and thinner; dark hollows came about her eyes; she was parting with life to give it to her child; she lost the girlish gaiety Tom used to admire, and the something more lovely that was taking its place he was not capable of seeing. He gave her less and less of his company. His countenance did not shine on her, in her heart she grew aware that she feared him, and ever as she shrunk, he withdrew. Had it not now been for Mary, she would likely have died. She did all for her that friend could. As often as she seemed able, she would take her for a drive, or on the river, that the wind, like a sensible presence of God, might blow upon her, and give her fresh life to take home with her. So little progress did she make with Hesper, that she could not help thinking it must have been for Letty's sake she was allowed to go to London.

Mr. and Mrs. Redmain went again to Durnmelling, but Mary begged Hesper to leave her behind. She told her the reason, without mentioning the name of the friend she desired to tend. Hesper shrugged her shoulders, as much as to say she wondered at her taste; but she did not believe that was in reality the cause of her wish, and

setting herself to find another, concluded she did not choose to show herself at Testbridge in her new position, and, afraid of losing if she opposed her, let her have her way. Nor, indeed, was she so necessary to her at Durnmelling, where there were few visitors, and comparatively little dressing was required: for the mere routine of such ordinary days, Jemima was enough, who, now and then called by Mary to her aid, had proved herself handy and capable, and had learned much.

So, all through the hottest of the late-summer and autumn weather, Mary remained in London, where every pavement seemed like the floor of a baker's oven, and, for all the life with which the city swarmed, the little winds that wandered through it seemed to have lost their vitality. How she longed for the common and the fields and the woods, where the very essence of life seemed to dwell in the atmosphere even when stillest, and the joy that came pouring from the throats of the birds seemed to flow first from her own soul into them! The very streets and lanes of Testbridge looked like Paradise to Mary in London. But she never wished herself in the shop again, although almost every night she dreamed of the glad old time when her father was in it with her, and when, although they might not speak from morning to night, their souls kept talking across crowd and counters, and each was always aware of the other's supporting presence.

Longing, however, is not necessarily pain—it may indeed be intensest bliss; and if Mary longed for the freedom of the country, it was not to be miserable that she could not have it. Her mere thought of it was to her a greater delight than the presence of all its joys is to many who desire them the most. That such things, and the possibility of such sensations from them, should

be in the world, was enough to make Mary jubilant. But then she was at peace with her conscience, and had her heart full of loving duty. Besides, an active patience is a heavenly power. Mary could not only walk along a pavement dry and lifeless as the Sahara, enjoying the summer that brooded all about and beyond the city, but she bore the refreshment of blowing winds and running waters into Letty's hot room, with the clanging street in front, and the little yard behind, where, from a cord stretched across between the walls, hung a few pieces of ill-washed linen, motionless in the glare, two plump sparrows picking up crumbs in their shadow;—into this live death Mary would carry a tone of breeze, and sailing cloud, and swaying tree-top. In her the life was so concentrated and active, that she was capable of communicating life—the highest of human endowments.

One evening, as Letty was telling her how the dress-maker up stairs had been for some time unwell, and Mary was feeling reproachful that she had not told her before, that she might have seen what she could do for her, they became aware, it seemed gradually, of one softest, sweetest, faintest music-tone coming from somewhere—but not seeming sufficiently of this world to disclose whence. Mary went to the window: there was nothing capable of music within sight. It came again; and intermittingly came and came. For some time they would hear nothing at all, and then again the most delicate of tones would creep into their ears, bringing with it more, it seemed to Mary in the surprise of its sweetness, than she could have believed single tone capable of carrying. Once or twice a few consecutive sounds made a division strangely sweet; and then again, for a time, nothing would reach them but a note here and a note there of what she was fain to imagine a

wonderful melody. The visitation lasted for about an hour, then ceased. Letty went to bed, and all night long dreamed she heard the angels calling her. She woke weeping that her time was come so early, while as yet she had tasted so little of the pleasure of life. But the truth was, she had as yet, poor child, got so little of the *good* of life, that it was not at all time for her to go.

When her hour drew near, Tom condescended—unwillingly, I am sorry to say, for he did not take the trouble to understand her feelings—to leave word where he might be found if he should be wanted. Even this assuagement of her fears Letty had to plead for: Mary's being so much with her was to him reason, and he made it excuse, for absence: he had begun to dread Mary. Nor, when at length he was sent for, was he in any great haste: all was well over ere he arrived. But he was a little touched when, drawing his face down to hers, she feebly whispered, "He's as like to you, Tom, as ever small thing was to great!" She saw the slight emotion, and fell asleep comforted.

It was night when she woke. Mary was sitting by her.

"Oh, Mary!" she cried, "the angels have been calling me again. Did you hear them?"

"No," answered Mary, a little coldly, for if ever she was inclined to be hard, it was towards self-sentiment. "Why do you think the angels should call you? Do you suppose them very desirous of your company?"

"They do call people," returned Letty, almost crying; "and I don't know why they mightn't call me: I'm not such a very wicked person!"

Mary's heart smote her: she was refusing Letty the time God was giving her! She could not wake her up, and while God was waking her, she was impatient!

"I heard the call too, Letty," she said; "but it was

not the angels. It was the same instrument we heard the other night. Who can there be in the house to play like that! It was clearer this time. I thought I could listen to it a whole year."

"Why didn't you wake me?" said Letty.

"Because the more you sleep the better. And the doctor says I mustn't let you talk. I will get you something, and then you must go to sleep again."

Tom did not appear any more that night; and if they had wanted him now, they would not have known where to find him. He was about nothing very bad—only supping with some friends—such friends as he did not even care to tell that he had a son.

He was ashamed of being in London at this time of the year, and but that he had not money enough to go anywhere except to his mother's, he would have gone, and left Letty to shift for herself.

With his child he was pleased, and would not seldom take him for a few moments; but when he cried, he was cross with him, and showed himself the unreasonable baby of the two.

The angels did not want Letty just yet, and she slowly recovered.

For Mary it was a peaceful time. She was able to read a good deal, and, although there were no books in Mr. Redmain's house, she generally succeeded in getting such as she wanted. She was able also to practise as much as she pleased, for now the grand piano was entirely at her service, and she took the opportunity of having a lesson every day.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MUSICIAN.

ONE evening, soon after the baby's arrival, as Mary sat with him in her lap, the sweet tones they had heard twice before, came creeping into her ears so gently, that she seemed to be aware of their presence only after they had been for some time coming and going: she laid the baby down, and stealing from the room, listened on the landing. Certainly the sounds were born in the house, but whether they came from below or above she could not tell. Going first down the stair, and then up, she soon satisfied herself that they came from above, and thereupon ventured a little farther up the stair.

She had already been to see the dressmaker, whom she had come to know through the making of Hesper's twilight robe of cloud, had found her far from well, and had done what she could for her. But she was in no want, and of more than ordinary independence—a Yorkshire woman, about forty years of age, delicate, but of great patience and courage; a plain, fair, freckled woman, with a belief in religion rather than in God. Very strict therefore in her observances, she thought a great deal more of the Sabbath than of man, a great deal more of the Bible than of the truth, and ten times more of her creed than of the will of God; and had she heard any one utter such words as I have just written, would have said he was an atheist. She was a worthy creature, notwithstanding, only very unpleasant if one happened to step on the toes of a pet ignorance. Mary soon discovered that there was no profit in talking with her on

the subjects she loved most: plainly she knew little about them, except at second hand—that is through the forms of other minds than her own. Such people seem intended for the special furtherance of the saints in patience; being utterly unassailable by reason, they are especially trying to those who desire to stand on brotherly terms with all men, and so are the more sensitive to the rudeness that always goes with moral stupidity: intellectual stupidity may coexist with the loveliness of an angel. It is one of the blessed hopes of the world to come, that there will be none such in it. But why so many words? I say to myself: will one of such as I mean, recognize his portrait in my sketch? Many such have I met in my young days, and in my old days I find they swarm still. I could wish that all such had to earn their own bread like Ann Byrom: had she been rich, she would have been unbearable. Women like her, when they are well to do, walk with a manly stride, make the tails of their dresses go like the screw of a steamer behind them, and are not unfrequently Scotch.

As Mary went up, the music ceased; but, hoping Miss Byrom would be able to enlighten her concerning its source, she continued her ascent, and knocked at her door. A voice, rather wooden, yet not without character, invited her to enter.

Ann sat near the window, for, although it was quite dusk, a little use might yet be made of the lingering ghost of the daylight. Almost all Mary could see of her was the reflection from the round eyes of a pair of horn spectacles.

“How do you do, Miss Byrom?” she said.

“Not at all well,” answered Ann, almost in a tone of offence.

“Is there nothing I can do for you?” asked Mary.

"We are to owe no man anything but love, the apostle tells us."

"You must owe a good deal of that, then," said Mary, one part vexed, and two parts amused, "for you don't seem to pay much of it."

She was just beginning to be sorry for what she had said, when she was startled by a sound very like a little laugh, which seemed to come from behind her. She turned quickly, but before she could see anything through the darkness, the softest of violin-tones thrilled the air close beside her, and then she saw, seated on the corner of Ann's bed, the figure of a man—young or old she could not tell. How could he have kept so still! His bow was wandering slowly about over the strings of his violin; but presently, having overcome, as it seemed, with the help of his instrument, his inclination to laugh, he ceased, and all was still.

"I came," said Mary, turning again to Ann, "hoping you might be able to tell me where the sweet sounds came from, which we have heard now two or three times; but I had no idea there was any one in the room besides yourself.—They come at intervals a great deal too long," she added, turning towards the figure in the darkness.

"I am afraid my ear is out sometimes," said the man, mistaking her remark. "I think it comes of the anvil."

The voice was manly, though gentle, and gave an impression of utter directness and simplicity. It was Mary's turn, however, not to understand, and she made no answer.

"I am very sorry," the musician went on, "if I annoyed you, miss."

Mary was hastening to assure him that the fact was quite the other way, when Ann prevented her.

"I told you so!" she said: "*you* make an idol of your foolish plaything, but other people take it only for the nuisance it is."

"Indeed you never were more mistaken," said Mary. "Both Mrs. Helmer and myself are charmed with the little that reaches us. It is indeed seldom one hears tones of such purity."

The player responded with a sigh of pleasure.

"Now there you are, miss," cried Ann, "a flattering of his folly till not a word I say will be of the smallest use!"

"If your words are not wise," said Mary, with suppressed indignation, "the less he heeds them the better."

"It ain't wise, to my judgment, miss, to make a man think himself something when he is nothing. It's quite enough a man should deceive his own self, without another to come and help him."

"To speak the truth is not to deceive," replied Mary. "I have some knowledge of music, and I say only what is true."

"What good can it be spending his time scraping horse-hair athort catgut!"

"They must fancy some good in it up in heaven," said Mary, "or they wouldn't have so much of it there."

"There ain't no fiddles in heaven," said Ann, with indignation; "they've nothing there but harps and trumpets."

Mary turned to the man, who had not said a word.

"Would you mind coming down with me," she said, "and playing a little, very softly, to my friend? She has a little baby, and is not strong. It would do her good."

"She'd better read her bible," said Ann, who, finding she could no longer see, was lighting a candle.

"She does read her bible," returned Mary; "and a little music would perhaps help her to read it to better purpose."

"There, Ann!" cried the player.

The woman replied with a scornful grunt.

"Two fools don't make a wise man, for all the franchise," she said.

But Mary had once more turned towards the musician, and in the light of the candle was met by a pair of black eyes, keen yet soft, looking out from under an overhanging ridge of forehead. The rest of the face was in shadow, but she could see by the whiteness through a beard that clouded all the lower part of it, that he was smiling to himself: Mary had said what pleased him, and his eyes sought her face, and seemed to rest on it with a kind of trust, and a look as if he was ready to do whatever she might ask of him.

"You will come?" said Mary.

"Yes, miss, with all my heart," he replied, and flashed a full smile that rested upon Ann, and seemed to say he knew her not so hard as she looked.

Rising, he tucked his violin under his arm, and showed himself ready to follow.

"Good night, Miss Byrom," said Mary.

"Good night, miss," returned Ann grimly. "I'm sorry for you both, miss.—But until the spirit is poured out from on high, it's nothing but a stumbling in the dark."

This last utterance was a reflection rather than a remark.

Mary made no reply. She did not care to have the last word; nor did she fancy her cause lost when she had not at hand the answer that befitted folly. She ran down the stair, and at the bottom stood waiting her new acquaintance, who descended more slowly, careful not to make a noise.

She could now see, by the gas-light that burned on

the landing, a little more of what the man was. He was powerfully built, rather over middle height, and about the age of thirty. His complexion was dark, and the hand that held the bow looked grimy. He bore himself well, but a little stiffly, with a care over his violin like that of a man carrying a baby. He was decidedly handsome, in a rugged way—mouth and chin but hinted through a thick beard of darkest brown.

“Come this way,” said Mary, leading him into Letty’s parlour. “I will tell my friend you are come. Her room, you see, opens off this, and she will hear you delightfully. Pray, take a seat.”

“Thank you, miss,” said the man, but remained standing.

“I have caught the bird, Letty,” said Mary, loud enough for him to hear; “and he is come to sing a little to you—if you feel strong enough for it.”

“It will do me good,” said Letty. “How kind of him!”

The man, having heard, was already tuning his violin when Mary came from the bedroom, and sat down on the sofa. The instant he had got it to his mind, he turned, and going to the farthest corner of the room, closed his eyes tight, and began to play.

But how shall I describe that playing? how convey an idea of it, however remote? I fear it is nothing less than presumption in me, so great is my ignorance, to attempt the thing. But would it be right, for dread of bringing shame upon me through failure, to leave my readers without any notion of it at all? On the other hand, I shall at least have the merit of daring to fail—a merit of which I could well be ambitious.

If then my reader will imagine some music-loving sylph attempting to guide the wind amongst the strings

of an æolian harp, every now and then for a moment succeeding, and then again for a while the wind having its own way, he will gain, I think, something like a dream-notion of the man's playing. Mary tried hard to get hold of some clue to the combinations and sequences, but the motive of them she could not find. Whatever their source, there was, either in the composition itself, or in his mode of playing, not a little of the inartistic, that is the lawless. Yet every now and then would come a passage of exquisite melody, owing much, however, no doubt, to the marvellous delicacy of the player's tones, and the utterly tender expression with which he produced them. But ever as she thought to get some insight into the movement of the man's mind, still would she be swept away on the storm of some change, seeming of mood incongruous.

At length came a little pause. He wiped his forehead with a blue cotton handkerchief, and seemed ready to begin again. Mary interrupted him with the question,—

“Will you please tell me whose music you have been playing?”

He opened his eyes, which had remained closed even while he stood motionless, and, with a smile sweeter than any she had ever seen on such a strong face, answered,—

“It's nobody's, miss.”

“Do you mean you have been extemporizing all this time?”

“I don't know exactly what that means.”

“You must have learned it from notes?”

“I couldn't read them if I had any to read,” he answered.

“Then what an ear and what a memory you must have! How often have you heard it?”

"Just as often as I've played it, and no oftener. Not being able to read, and seldom hearing any music I care for, I'm forced to be content with what runs out at my fingers when I shut my eyes. It all comes of shutting my eyes. I couldn't play a thing but for shutting my eyes. It's a wonderful deal that comes of shutting your eyes! Did you never try it, miss?"

Mary was so astonished both by what he said, and the simplicity with which he said it, having clearly no notion that he was uttering anything strange, that she was silent, and the man, after a moment's retuning, began again to play. Then did Mary gather all her listening powers, and brace her attention to the tightest—but at first with no better success. And indeed that was not the way to understand. It seems to me at least, in my great ignorance, that one cannot understand music unless he is humble towards it, and consents, if need be, not to understand. When one is quiescent, submissive, opens the ears of the mind, and demands of them nothing more than the hearing—when the rising waters of question retire to their bed, and individuality is still, then the dews and rains of music, finding the way clear for them, soak and sink through the sands of the mind, down, far down, below the thinking-place, down to the region of music, which is the hidden workshop of the soul, the place where lies ready the divine material for man to go making withal.

Weary at last with vain effort, she ceased to endeavour, and in a little while was herself being moulded by the music unconsciously received to the further understanding of it. It wrought in her mind pictures, not thoughts. It is possible, however, my later knowledge may affect my description of what Mary then saw with her mind's eye.

First there was a crowd in slow, then rapid movement. Arose cries and entreaties. Came hurried motions, disruption, and running feet. A pause followed. Then woke a lively melody, changing to the prayer of some soul too grateful to find words. Next came a bar or two of what seemed calm, lovely speech, then a few slowly delivered chords, and all was still.

She came to herself, and then first knew that, like sleep, the music had seized her unawares, and she had been understanding, or at least enjoying, without knowing it. The man was approaching her from his dark corner. His face was shining, but plainly he did not intend more music, for his violin was already under his arm. He made her a little awkward bow—not much more than a nod, and turned to the door. He had it half open, and not yet could Mary speak. For Letty, she was fast asleep.

From the top of the stair came the voice of Ann, screaming,—

“Here’s your hat, Joe. I knew you’d be going when you played that. You’d have forgotten it, *I* know!”

Mary heard the hat come tumbling down the stair.

“Thank you, Ann,” returned Joe. “Yes, I’m going. The ladies don’t care much for my music.—Nobody does but myself. But then it’s good for me.”

The last two sentences were spoken in soliloquy, but Mary heard them, for he stood with the handle of the door in his hand. He closed it, picked up his hat, and went softly down the stair.

The spell was broken, and Mary darted to the door. But just as she opened it, the outer door closed behind the strange musician, and she had not even learned his name.

CHAPTER IX.

A CHANGE.

As soon as Letty had strength enough to attend to her baby without help, Mary, to the surprise of her mistress, and the destruction of her theory concerning her stay in London, presented herself at Durnmelling, found that she was more welcome than looked for, and the same hour resumed her duties about Hesper.

It was with curiously mingled feelings that she gazed from her window on the chimneys of Thornwick. How much had come to her since first, in the summer-seat at the end of the yew-hedge, Mr. Wardour opened to her the door of literature! It was now autumn, and the woods, to get young again, were dying their yearly death. For the moment she felt as if she too had begun to grow old. Ministration had tired her a little—but, oh! how different its weariness from that which came of labour amid obstruction and insult! Her heart beat a little slower, perhaps, but she could now be sad without losing a jot of hope. Nay, rather, the least approach of sadness would begin at once to wake her hope. She regretted nothing that had come, nothing that had gone. She believed more and more that not anything worth having is ever lost; that even the most evanescent shades of feeling are safe for those who grow after their true nature, towards that for which they were made—in other and higher words, after the will of God.

But she did for a moment taste some bitterness in her cup, when, one day, on the footpath to Testbridge, near the place where, that memorable Sunday, she met

Mr. Wardour, she met him again, and, looking at her, and plainly recognizing her, he passed without salutation. Like a sudden wave the blood rose to her face, and then sank to the deeps of her heart; and from somewhere came the conviction that one day the destiny of Godfrey Wardour would be in her hands: he had done more for her than any but her father; and when that day was come, he should not find her fail him!

She was then on her way to the shop. She did not at all relish entering it, but, as she had a large money-interest in the business, she ought at least, she said to herself, to pay the place a visit. When she went in, Turnbull did not at first recognize her, and, taking her for a customer, blossomed into repulsive suavity. The change that came over his countenance when he knew her, was a shadow of such mingled and conflicting shades, that she felt there was something peculiar in it, which she must attempt to analyze. It remained hardly a moment to encounter question, but was almost immediately replaced with a politeness evidently false. Then first she began to be aware of distrusting the man.

Asking a few questions about the business, to which he gave answers most satisfactory, she kept casting her eyes about the shop, unable to account for the impression the look of it made upon her. Either her eyes had formed for themselves another scale, and could no more rightly judge between past and present, or the aspect of the place was different, and not so satisfactory. Was there less in it? she asked herself—or was it only not so well kept as when she left it? She could not tell. Neither could she understand the profound but distant consideration with which Mr. Turnbull endeavoured to behave to her, treating her like a stranger to whom he must, against his inclination, manifest all possible respect, while he did

not invite her even to call at *the villa*. She bought a pair of gloves of the young woman who seemed to occupy her place, paid for them, and left the shop without speaking to any one else. All the time, George was standing behind the opposite counter, staring at her; but, much to her relief, he showed no other sign of recognition.

Before she went to find Beenie, who was still at Testbridge, in a cottage of her own, she felt she must think over these things, and come, if possible, to some conclusion about them. She left the town therefore, and walked homeward.

What did it all mean? She knew very well they must look down on her ten times more than ever, because of the *menial* position in which she had placed herself, sinking thereby beyond all pretence to be regarded as their equal. But if that was what the man's behaviour meant, why was he so studiously—not so much polite as respectful? That did not use to be Mr. Turnbull's way where he looked down upon one. And then what did the shadow preceding this behaviour mean? Was there not in it something more than annoyance at the sight of her? It was with an effort he dismissed it! She had never seen that look upon him!

Then there was the impression the shop made on her! Was there anything in that? Somehow it certainly seemed to have a shabby look! Was it possible anything was wrong, or going wrong with the concern? Her father had always spoken with great respect of Mr. Turnbull's business faculties, but she knew he had never troubled himself to look into the books, or know how they stood with the bank. She knew also that Mr. Turnbull was greedy after money, and that his wife was ambitious, and hated the business. But if he wanted to be out of it, would he not naturally keep it up to the best, at least in

appearance, that he might part with his share in it to the better advantage?

She turned, and walking back to the town, sought Beenie.

The old woman being naturally a gossip, Mary was hardly seated before she began to pour out the talk of the town, in which came presently certain rumours concerning Mr. Turnbull—mainly hints at speculation and loss.

The result was that Mary went from Beenie to the lawyer in whose care her father had left his affairs. He was an old man, and had been ill; had no suspicion of anything being wrong, but would look into the matter at once. She went home, and troubled herself no more.

She had been at Durnmelling but a few days, when Mr. Redmain, wishing to see how things were on his estate in Cornwall, and making up his mind to run down, carelessly asked his wife if she would accompany him: it would be only for a few days, he said; but a breeze or two from the Atlantic would improve her complexion. This was gracious; but he was always more polite in the company of Lady Margaret, who continued to show him the kindness no one else dared or was inclined to do. For some years he had suffered increasingly from recurrent attacks of the disease to which I have already referred; and whatever might be the motive of his mother-in-law's behaviour, certainly, in those attacks, it was a comfort to him to be near her. On such occasions in London, his sole attendant was his man Mewks.

Mary was delighted to see more of her country. She had travelled very little, but was capable of gathering ten times more from a journey to Cornwall, than most travellers from one through Switzerland itself. The place to which they went was lonely and lovely, and Mary, for the first few days, enjoyed it unspeakably.

But then, suddenly, as was not unusual, Mr. Redmain was taken ill. For some reason or other, he had sent his man to London, and the only other they had with them, besides the coachman, was useless in such a need, while the housekeeper who lived at the place was nearly decrepit; so that of the household Mary alone was capable of fit attendance in the sick-room. Hesper shrunk, almost with horror, certainly with disgust, from the idea of having anything to do with her husband as an invalid. When she had the choice of her company, she said, she would not choose his. Mewks was sent for at once, but did not arrive before the patient had had some experience of Mary's tendance; nor after he came, was she altogether without opportunity of ministering to him. The attack was a long and severe one, delaying for many weeks their return to London, where Mr. Redmain declared he must be, at any risk, before the end of November.

CHAPTER X.

LYDGATE STREET.

LETTY'S whole life was now gathered about her boy, and she thought little, comparatively, about Tom. And Tom thought so little about her, that he did not perceive the difference. When he came home, he was always in a hurry to be gone again. He had always something important to do, but it never showed itself to Letty in the shape of money. He gave her a little now and then, of course, and she made it go incredibly far, but it was ever with more of a grudge that he gave it. The influence over him of Sepia was scarcely less now that she

was gone; but if she cared for him at all, it was mainly that, being now not a little stale-hearted, his devotion reminded her pleasurable of a time when other passions than those of self-preservation were strongest in her; and her favour even now tended only to the increase of Tom's growing disappointment, for, like Macbeth, he had begun already to consider life but a poor affair. Across the cloud of this death gleamed, certainly, the flashing of Sepia's eyes, or the softly infolding dawn of her smile, but only, the next hour, nay, the next moment, to leave all darker than before. Precious is the favour of any true, good woman, be she what else she may; but what is the favour of one without heart or faith or self-giving? Yet is there testimony only too strong and terrible to the demoniacal power, enslaving and absorbing as the arms of the kraken, of an evil woman over an imaginative youth. Possibly, did he know beforehand her nature, he would not love her, but knowing it only too late, he loves and curses; calls her the worst of names, yet cannot, or will not, tear himself free; after a fashion he still calls love, he loves the demon, and hates her thralldom. Happily Tom had not reached this depth of perdition; Sepia was prudent for herself, and knew, none better, what she was about, so far as the near future was concerned, therefore held him at arm's length, where Tom basked in a light that was of hell—for what is a hell, or a woman like Sepia, but an inverted creation?

His nature, in consequence, was in all directions dissolving. He drank more and more strong drink, fitting fuel to such his passion, and Sepia liked to see him approach with his eyes blazing. There are not many women like her; she is a rare type—but not therefore to be passed over in silence. It is little consolation that the man-eating tiger is a rare animal, if one of them be

actually on the path; and to the philosopher a possibility is a fact. But the true value of the study of abnormal development is, that, in the deepest sense such development is not abnormal at all, but the perfected result of the laws that avenge law-breach. It is in and through such, that we get glimpses, down the gulf of a moral volcano, to the infernal possibilities of the human—the lawless rot of that which, in its *attainable* idea, is nothing less than divine, imagined, foreseen, cherished, and laboured for, by the Father of the human. Such inverted possibility, the infernal possibility, I mean, lies latent in every one of us, and except we stir ourselves up to the right, will gradually, from a possibility, become an energy. The wise man dares not yield to a temptation, were it only for the terror that, if he do, he will yield the more readily again. The common-place critic, who recognizes life solely upon his own conscious level, mocks equally at the ideal and its antipode, incapable of recognizing the art of Shakspeare himself as true to the human nature that will not be human.

I have said that Letty did her best with what money Tom gave her; but when she came to find that he had not paid the lodging for two months; that the payment of various things he had told her to order and he would see to, had been neglected, and that the tradespeople were getting persistent in their applications; that, when she told him anything of the sort, he treated it at one time as a matter of no consequence which he would speedily set right, at another as behaviour of the creditor hugely impertinent, which he would punish by making him wait his time—her heart at length sank within her, and she felt there was no bulwark between her and a sea of troubles; she felt as if she lay already in the depths of a debtors' gaol. Therefore, sparing as she had

been from the first, she was more sparing than ever. Not only would she buy nothing for which she could not pay down, having often in consequence to go without proper food, but, even when she had a little in hand, would live like an anchorite. She grew very thin; and indeed, if she had not been of the healthiest, could not have stood her own treatment many weeks.

Her baby soon began to show suffering, but this did not make her alter her way, or drive her to appeal to Tom. She was ignorant of the simplest things a mother needs to know, and never imagined her abstinence could hurt her baby. So long as she went on nursing him, it was all the same, she thought. He cried so much, that Tom made it a reason with himself, and indeed gave it as one to Letty, for not coming home at night: the child would not let him sleep; and how was he to do his work, if he had not his night's rest? It mattered little with semi-mechanical professions like medicine, or the law, but how was a man to write articles such as he wrote, not to mention poetry, except he had the repose necessary to the redintegration of his exhausted brain? The baby went on crying, and the mother's heart was torn. The woman of the house said he must be already cutting his teeth, and recommended some devilish syrup. Letty bought a bottle with the next money she got, and thought it did him good—because, lessening his appetite, it lessened his crying, and also made him sleep more than he ought.

At last one night Tom came home very much the worse of drink, and in maudlin affection insisted on taking the baby from its cradle. The baby shrieked. Tom was angry with the weakling, rated him soundly for ingratitude to "the author of his being," and shook him

roughly to teach him the good manners of the world he had came to.

Thereat in Letty sprang up the mother, erect and fierce. She darted to Tom, snatched the child from his arms, and turned to carry him to the inner room. But, as the mother rose in Letty, the devil rose in Tom. If what followed was not the doing of the real Tom, it was the doing of the devil to whom the real Tom had opened the door. With one stride he overtook his wife, and mother and child lay together on the floor. I must say for him that, even in his drunkenness, he did not strike his wife as he would have struck a man; it was an open-handed blow he gave her, what, in familiar language, is called a box on the ear, but for days she carried the record of it on her cheek in five red finger-marks.

When he saw her on the floor, Tom's bedazed mind came to itself, he knew what he had done, and was sobered. But, alas! even then he thought more of the wrong he had done to himself as a gentleman, than of the grievous wound he had given his wife's heart. He took the baby, who had ceased to cry as soon as he was in his mother's arms, and laid him on the rug, then lifted the bitterly-weeping Letty, placed her on the sofa, and knelt beside her—not humbly to entreat her pardon, but, as was his wont, to justify himself by proving that all the blame was hers, and that she had wronged him greatly in driving him to do such a thing. This for apology poor Letty, never having had from him fuller acknowledgment of wrong, was fain to accept. She turned on the sofa, threw her arms about his neck, kissed him, and clung to him with an utter forgiveness. But all it did for Tom was to restore him his good opinion of himself, and enable him to go on feeling as much of a gentleman as before.

Reconciled, they turned to the baby. He was pale, his eyes were closed, and they could not tell whether he breathed. In a horrible fright, Tom ran for the doctor. Before he returned with him the child had come to, and the doctor could discover no injury from the fall they told him he had had. At the same time, he said he was not properly nourished, and must have better food.

This was a fresh difficulty to Letty; it was a call for more outlay. And now their landlady, who had throughout been very kind, was in trouble about her own rent, and began to press for part at least of theirs. Letty's heart seemed to labour under a stone. She forgot that there was a thing called joy. So sad she looked that the good woman, full of pity, assured her that, come what might, she should not be turned out, but at the worst would only have to go a story higher, to inferior rooms. The rent should wait, she said, until better days. But this kindness relieved Letty only a little, for the rent past and the rent to come hung upon her like a cloak of lead.

Nor was even debt the worst that now oppressed her. For, possibly from the fall, but more from the prolonged want of suitable nourishment and wise treatment, after that terrible night the baby grew worse. Many were the tears the sleepless mother shed over the sallow face and wasted limbs of her slumbering treasure—her one antidote to countless sorrows; and many were the foolish means she tried to restore his sinking vitality.

Mary had written to her, and she had written to Mary; but she had said nothing of the straits to which she was reduced: that would have been to bring blame upon Tom. But Mary, with her fine human instinct, felt that things must be going worse with her than before; and when she found that her return was indefinitely

postponed by Mr. Redmain's illness, she ventured at last in her anxiety upon a daring measure: she wrote to Mr. Wardour, telling him she had reason to fear things were not going well with Letty Helmer, and suggesting, in the gentlest way, whether it might not now be time to let bygones be bygones, and make some inquiry concerning her.

To this letter Godfrey returned no answer. For all her denial, he had never ceased to believe that Mary had been Letty's accomplice throughout that miserable affair; and the very name—the Letty and the Helmer—stung him to the quick. He took it therefore as a piece of utter presumption in Mary to write to him about Letty, and that in the tone, as he interpreted it, of one reading him a lesson of duty. But while he was thus indignant with Mary, he was also vexed with Letty that she should not herself have written to him if she was in any need, forgetting that he had never hinted at any door of communication open between him and her. His heart quivered at the thought that she might be in distress: he had known for certain, he said, the fool would bring her to misery! For himself, the thought of Letty was an ever open wound—with an ever present pain, now dull and aching, now keen and stinging. The agony of her desertion, he said, would never cease gnawing at his heart until it was laid in the grave: like most heathen Christians, he thought of death as the end of all the joys, sorrows, and interests generally of this life. But while thus he brooded, a fierce and evil joy awoke in him at the thought that now at last the expected hour had come when he would heap coals of fire on her head. He was still fool enough to think of her as having forsaken him, although he had never given her ground for believing, and she had never had conceit enough to imagine, that he cared

the least for her person. If he could but let her have a glimmer of what she had lost in losing him! She knew what she had gained in Tom Helmer!

He passed a troubled night, dreamed painfully, and started awake to renewed pain. Before morning he had made up his mind to take the first train to London. But he thought far more of being her deliverer, than of bringing her deliverance.

CHAPTER XI.

GODFREY AND LETTY.

It was a sad, gloomy, kindless November night, when Godfrey arrived in London. The wind was cold, the pavements were cold, the houses seemed to be not only cold but feeling it. The very dust that blew in his face was cold. Now cold is a powerful ally of the commonplace, and imagination therefore was not very busy in the bosom of Godfrey Wardour as he went to find Letty Helmer, which was just as well, in the circumstances. He was cool to the very heart when he walked up to the door indicated by Mary, and rung the bell: Mrs. Helmer was at home: would he walk upstairs?

It was not a house of ceremonies; he was shown up and into the room where she sat, without a word carried before to prepare her for his visit. It was so dark that he could see nothing but the figure of one at work by a table, on which stood a single candle. There was but a spark of fire in the dreary grate, and Letty was colder than any one could know, for she was at the moment making down the last woolly garment she had, in the vain hope of warming her baby.

She looked up. She had thought it was the landlady, and had waited for her to speak. She gazed for a moment in bewilderment, saw who it was, and jumped up half-frightened, half ready to go wild with joy. All the memories of Godfrey rushed in a confused heap upon her, and overwhelmed her. She ran to him, and the same moment was in his arms, with her head on his shoulder, weeping tears of such gladness as she had not known since the first week of her marriage.

Neither spoke for some time; Letty could not because she was crying, and Godfrey would not because he did not want to cry. Those few moments were pure, simple happiness to both of them; to Letty, because she had loved him from childhood, and hoped that all was to be as of old between them; to Godfrey, because, for the moment, he had forgotten himself, and had neither thought of injury, nor hope of love, remembering only the old days, and the Letty that used to be. It may seem strange that, having never once embraced her all the time they lived together, he should do so now; but Letty's love would any time have responded to the least show of affection, and when, at the sight of his face, into which memory had called up all his tenderness, she rushed into his arms, how could he help kissing her? The pity was that he had not kissed her long before. Or was it a pity? I think not.

But the embrace could not be a long one. Godfrey was the first to relax its strain, and Letty responded with an instant collapse; for instantly she feared she had done it all, and disgusted Godfrey. But he led her gently to the sofa, and sat down beside her on the hard old slippery horsehair. Then first he perceived what a change had passed upon her. Pale was she, and thin, and sad, with such big eyes, and the bone tightening

the skin upon her forehead! He felt as if she were a spectre-Letty, not the Letty he had loved. Glancing up, she caught his troubled gaze.

"I am not ill, cousin Godfrey," she said. "Do not look at me so, or I shall cry again. You know you never liked to see me cry."

"My poor girl!" said Godfrey, in a voice which, if he had not kept it lower than natural, would have broken, "you are suffering."

"Oh, no, I'm not," replied Letty, with a pitiful effort at the cheerful; "I am only so glad to see you again, cousin Godfrey."

She sat on the edge of the sofa, and had put her open hands, palm to palm, between her knees, in a childish way, looking like one chidden, who did not deserve it, but was ready to endure. For a moment Godfrey sat gazing at her, with troubled heart and troubled looks, then between his teeth muttered, "Damn the rascal!"

Letty sat straight up, and turned upon him eyes of appeal, scared, yet ready to defend. Her hands were now clenched, one on each side of her; she was poking the little fists into the squab of the sofa.

"Cousin Godfrey!" she cried, "if you mean Tom, you must not, you must not. I will go away if you speak a word against him. I will; I will.—I *must*, you know!"

Godfrey made no reply—neither apologized, nor sought to cover.

"Why, child!" he said at last, "you are half starved!"

The pity and tenderness of both word and tone were too much for her. She had not been at all pitying herself, but such an utterance from the man she loved like an elder brother, so wrought upon her enfeebled con-

dition, that she broke into a cry. She strove to suppress her emotion; she fought with it; in her agony she would have rushed from the room, had not Godfrey caught her, drawn her down beside him, and kept her there.

"You shall not leave me!" he said, in that voice Letty had always been used to obey. "Who has a right to know how things go with you, if I have not? Come, you must tell me all about it."

"I have nothing to tell, cousin Godfrey," she replied with some calmness, for Godfrey's decision had enabled her to conquer herself, "except that baby is ill, and looks as if he would never get better, and it is like to break my heart. Oh, he is such a darling, cousin Godfrey!"

"Let me see him," said Godfrey, in his heart detesting the child—the visible sign that another was nearer to Letty than he.

She jumped up, almost ran into the next room, and coming back with her little one, laid him in Godfrey's arms. The moment he felt the weight of the little, sad-looking, sleeping thing, he grew human towards him, and saw in him Letty and not Tom.

"Good God! the child is starving too," he exclaimed.

"Oh, no, cousin Godfrey!" cried Letty; "he is not starving. He had a fresh-laid egg for breakfast this morning, and some arrowroot for dinner, and some bread and milk for tea,—"

"London milk!" said Godfrey.

"Well, it is not like the milk in the dairy at Thornwick," admitted Letty. "If he had milk like that, he would soon be well!"

But Godfrey dared not say "Bring him to Thornwick:" he knew his mother too well for that!

"When were you anywhere in the country?" he asked. In a negative kind of way he was still nursing the baby.

"Not since we were married," she answered sadly. "You see poor Tom can't afford it."

Now Godfrey happened to have heard "from the best authority," that Tom's mother was far from illiberal to him.

"Mrs. Helmer allows him so much a year—does she not?" he said.

"I know he gets money from her, but it can't be much," she answered.

Godfrey's suspicions against Tom increased every moment. He must learn the truth. He *would* have it, if by an even cruel experiment! He sat a moment silent—then said, with assumed cheerfulness,—

"Well, Letty, I suppose, for the sake of old times, you will give me some dinner?"

Then indeed her courage gave way. She turned from him, laid her head on the end of the sofa, and sobbed so that the room seemed to shake with the convulsions of her grief.

"Letty," said Godfrey, laying his hand on her head, "it is no use any more trying to hide the truth. I don't want any dinner; in fact, I dined long ago. But you would not be open with me, and I was forced to find out for myself: you have not enough to eat, and you know it. I will not say a word about who is to blame—for anything I know, it may be no one—I am sure it is not you. But this must not go on! See, I have brought you a little pocket-book. I will call again to-morrow, and you will tell me then how you like it."

He laid the pocket-book on the table. There was ten times as much in it as ever Letty had had at once.

But she never knew what was in it. She rose with instant resolve. All the woman in her waked at once. She felt that a moment was come when she must be resolute, or lose her hold on life.

"Cousin Godfrey," she said, in a tone he scarcely recognized as hers—it frightened him as if it came from a sepulchre—"if you do not take that purse away, I will throw it in the fire without opening it. If my husband cannot give me enough to eat, I can starve as well as another. If you loved Tom, it would be different, but you hate him, and I will have nothing from you. Take it away, cousin Godfrey."

Mortified, hurt, miserable, Godfrey took the purse, and without a word walked from the room. Somewhere down in his secret heart, was dawning an idea of Letty beyond anything he used to think of her, but in the meantime he was only blindly aware that his heart had been shot through and through. Nor was this the time for him to reflect that, under his training, Letty, even if he had married her, would never have grown to such dignity.

It was indeed only in that moment she had become capable of the action. She had been growing as none, not Mary, still less herself, knew, under the heavy snows of affliction, and this was her first blossom. Not many of my readers will mistake me, I trust. Had it been in Letty pride that refused help from such an old friend, that pride I should count no blossom, but one of the meanest rags that ever fluttered to scare the birds. But the dignity of her refusal was in this—that she would accept nothing in which her husband had and could have no human, that is, no spiritual share. She had married him because she loved him, and she would hold by him, wherever that might lead her: not wittingly

would she allow the finest edge, even of ancient kindness, to come between her Tom and herself! To accept from her cousin Godfrey the help her husband ought to provide her, would be to let him, however innocently, step into his place! There was no reasoning in her resolve: it was allied to that spiritual insight which, in simple natures, and in proportion to their simplicity, approaches or amounts to prophecy. As the presence of death will sometimes change even an ordinary man to a prophet, in times of sore need the child-like nature may well receive a vision sufficing to direct the doubtful step. Letty felt that the taking of that money would be the opening of a gulf to divide her and Tom for ever.

The moment Godfrey was out of the room, she cast herself on the floor, and sobbed as if her heart must break. But her sobs were tearless. And, oh, agony of agonies! unsought came the conviction, and she could not send it away—to this had sunk her lofty idea of her Tom!—that he would have had her take the money! More than once or twice, in the ill-humours that follow a forced hilarity, he had forgotten his claims to being a gentleman so far as—not exactly to reproach her with having brought him to poverty—but to remind her that, if she was poor, she was no poorer than she had been when dependent on the charity of a distant relation!

The baby began to cry. She rose and took him from the sofa where Godfrey had laid him when he was getting out the pocket-book, held him fast to her bosom, as if by laying their two aching lives together they might both be healed, and rocking him to and fro, said to herself, for the first time, that her trouble was greater than she could bear. “Oh, baby! baby! baby!” she

cried, and her tears streamed on the little wan face. But, as she sat with him in her arms, the blessed sleep came, and the storm sank to a calm.

CHAPTER XII.

RELIEF.

It was dark, utterly dark, when she woke. For a minute she could not remember where she was. The candle had burned out: it must be late. The baby was on her lap—still, very still. One faint gleam of satisfaction crossed her “during dark” at the thought that he slept so peacefully, hidden from the gloom which somehow appeared to be all the same gloom outside and inside of her. In that gloom she sat alone.

Suddenly a prayer was in her heart. It was moving there as of itself. It had come there by no calling of it thither, by no conscious will of hers: “O God,” she cried, “I am desolate!—Is there no help for me?” And therewith she knew that she had prayed, and knew that never in her life had she prayed before.

She started to her feet in an agony: a horrible fear had taken possession of her. With one arm she held the child fast to her bosom, with the other hand searched in vain to find a match. And still as she searched, the baby seemed to grow heavier upon her arm, and the fear sickened more and more at her heart.

At last she had light! and the face of the child came out of the darkness. But the child himself had gone away into it. The Unspeakable had come while she slept—had come and gone, and taken her child

with him. What was left of him was no more good to kiss than the last doll of her childhood!

When Tom came home, there was his wife on the floor as if dead, and a little way from her the child, dead indeed, and cold with death. He lifted Letty and carried her to the bed, amazed to find how light she was: it was long since he had had her thus in his arms. Then he laid her dead baby by her side, and ran to rouse the doctor. He came, and pronounced the child quite dead—from lack of nutrition, he said. To see Tom, no one could have helped contrasting his dress and appearance with the look and surroundings of his wife; but no one would have been ready to lay blame on him; and as for himself, he was not in the least awake to the fact of his guilt.

The doctor gave the landlady, who had responded at once to Tom's call, full directions for the care of the bereaved mother; Tom handed her the little money he had in his pocket, and she promised to do her best. And she did it; for she was one of those, not a few, who, knowing nothing of religion towards God, are yet full of religion towards their fellows, and with the Son of Man that goes a long way. As soon as it was light, Tom went to see about the burying of his baby.

He betook himself first to the editor of *The Firefly*, but had to wait a long time for his arrival at the office. He told him his baby was dead, and he wanted money. It was forthcoming at once; for literary men, like all other artists, are in general as ready to help each other as the very poor themselves. There is less generosity, I think, among business-men, than in any other class. The more honour to the exceptions!

"But," said the editor, who had noted the dry, burning palm, and saw the glazed, fiery eye of Tom, "my

dear fellow, you ought to be in bed yourself. It's no use taking on about the poor little kid: *you* couldn't help it. Go home to your wife, and tell her she's got you to nurse; and if she's in any fix, tell her to come to me."

Tom went home, but did not give his wife the message. She lay all but insensible, never asked for anything, or refused anything that was offered her, never said a word about her baby, or about Tom, or seemed to be more than when she lay in her mother's lap. Her baby was buried, and she knew nothing of it. Not until nine days were over did she begin to revive.

For the first few days, Tom, moved with undefined remorse, tried to take a part in nursing her. She took things from him as she did from the landlady, without heed or recognition. Just once, opening suddenly her eyes wide upon him, she uttered a feeble wail of "*Baby!*" and, turning her head, did not look at him again. Then first Tom's conscience gave him a sharp sting.

He was far from well. The careless and in many respects dissolute life he had been leading, had more than begun to tell on a constitution by no means strong, but he had never become aware of his weakness, nor had ever felt really ill until now.

But that sting, although the first sharp one, was not his first warning of a waking conscience. Ever since he took his place at his wife's bedside, he had been fighting off the conviction that he was a brute. He would not, he could not believe it. What! Tom Helmer, the fine, indubitable fellow! such as he had always known himself! he to cower before his own consciousness as a man unworthy, and greatly to be despised! Then chaos was come again! And verily chaos was there, but not by any means newly come. And moreover, when chaos

begins to be conscious of itself, then is the dawn of an ordered world at hand. Nay, the creation of it is already begun, and the pangs of the waking conscience are the prophecy of the new birth.

With that pitiful cry of his wife after her lost child, disbelief in himself got within the lines of his defence; he could do no more, and began to loathe that conscious self which had hitherto been his pride.

Whatever the effect of illness may be upon the temper of some, it is most certainly an ally of the conscience. All pains, indeed, and all sorrows, all demons, yea, and all sins themselves, under the suffering care of the highest minister, are but the ministers of truth and righteousness. I never came to know the condition of such as seemed exceptionally afflicted, but I seemed to see reason for their affliction, either in exceptional faultiness of character, or the greatness of the good it was doing them.

But conscience reacts on the body—for sickness until it is obeyed, for health thereafter. The moment conscience spoke thus plainly to Tom, the little that was left of his physical endurance gave way, his illness got the upper hand, and he took to his bed—all he could have for bed, that is—namely, the sofa in the sitting-room, widened out with chairs, and a mattress over all. There he lay, and their landlady had enough to do. Not that either of her patients was exacting; they were both too ill and miserable for that. It is the self-pitiful, self-coddling invalid that is exacting. Such, I suspect, require something sharper still.

Tom groaned and tossed, and cursed himself, and soon passed into delirium. Straightway his visions, animate with shame and confusion of soul, were more distressing than even his ready tongue could have told.

Dead babies and ghastly women pursued him everywhere. His fever increased. The cries of terror and dismay that he uttered, reached the ears of his wife, and were the first thing that roused her from her lethargy. She rose from her bed, and, just able to crawl, began to do what she could for him. If she could but get near enough to him, the husband would yet be dearer than any child. She had him carried to the bed, and thereafter took on the sofa what rest there was for her. To and fro between bed and sofa she crept, let the landlady say what she might, gave him all the food he could be got to take, cooled his burning hands and head, and cried over him because she could not take him on her lap like the baby that was gone. Once or twice, in a quieter interval, he looked at her pitifully, and seemed about to speak; but the back-surgings fever carried far away the word of love for which she listened so eagerly. The doctor came daily, but Tom grew worse, and Letty could not get well.

CHAPTER XIII.

GODFREY AND SEPIA.

WHEN the Redmains went to Cornwall, Sepia was left at Durnmelling, in the expectation of joining them in London within a fortnight at latest. The illness of Mr. Redmain, however, caused her stay to be prolonged, and she was worn out with ennui. The self she was so careful over, was not by any means good company: not seldom during her life had she found herself capable of almost anything to get rid of it, short of suicide or repentance. This autumn, at Durnmelling, she would even,

occasionally, with that object, when the weather was fine, go for a solitary walk—a thing, I need not say, she hated in itself, though now it was her forlorn hope, in the poor possibility of falling in with some distraction. But the hope was not altogether a vague one; for was there not a man somewhere underneath those chimneys she saw over the roof of the laundry? She had never spoken to him, but Hesper and she had often talked about him, and often watched him ride—never man more to her mind. In her wanderings she had come upon the breach in the hah, and, clambering up, found herself on the forbidden ground of a neighbour whom the family did not visit. To no such folly would Sepia be a victim.

The analysis of such a nature as hers, with her story to set it forth, would require a book to itself, and I must happily content myself with but a fact here and there in her history.

In one of her rambles on his ground she had her desire, and met Godfrey Wardour. He lifted his hat, and she stopped and addressed him by way of apology.

“I am afraid you think me very rude, Mr. Wardour,” she said. “I know I am trespassing, but this field of yours is higher than the ground about Durnmelling, and seems to take pounds off the weight of the atmosphere.”

For all he had gone through, Godfrey was not yet less than courteous to ladies. He assured Miss Yolland that Thornwick was as much at her service as if it were a part of Durnmelling.

“Though indeed,” he added with a smile, “it would be more correct to say, ‘as if Durnmelling were a part of Thornwick’—for that was the real state of the case once upon a time.”

The statement interested, or seemed to interest Miss Yolland, giving rise to many questions; and a long con-

versation ensued. Suddenly she woke, or seemed to wake to the consciousness that she had forgotten herself and the proprieties together: hastily, and to all appearance with some confusion, she wished him a good morning; but she was not too much confused to thank him again for the permission he had given her to walk on his ground.

It was not by any intention on the part of Godfrey that they met several times after this; but they always had a little conversation before they parted; nor did Sepia find any difficulty in getting him sufficiently within their range, to make him feel the power of her eyes. She was too prudent, however, to bring to bear upon any man all at once the full play of her mesmeric battery; and things had got no farther when she went to London—a week or two before the return of the Redmains, ostensibly to get things in some special readiness for Hesper; but that this may have been a pretence appears possible from the fact that Mary came from Cornwall on the same mission a few days later.

I have just mentioned an acquaintance of Sepia's, who attracted the notice, and roused the peculiar interest of Mr. Redmain, because of a look he saw pass betwixt them. This man spoke both English and French with a foreign accent, and gave himself out as a Georgian—Count Galofta, he called himself: I believe he was a prince in Paris. At this time he was in London, and during the ten days that Sepia was alone, came to see her several times—called early in the forenoon first, the next day in the evening, when they went together to the opera, and once came and stayed late. Whether from her dark complexion making her look older than she was, or from the subduing air which her experience had given her, or merely from the fact that she belonged to

nobody much, Miss Yolland seemed to have *carte blanche* to do as she pleased, and come and go when and where she liked, as one knowing well enough how to take care of herself.

Mary, arriving unexpectedly at the house in Glammis Square, met him in the hall as she entered: he had just taken leave of Sepia, who was going up the stair at the moment. Mary had never seen him before, but something about him caused her to look at him again as he passed.

Somehow, Tom also had discovered Sepia's return, and had gone to see her more than once.

When Mr. and Mrs. Redmain arrived, there was so much to be done for Hesper's wardrobe, that for some days Mary found it impossible to go and see Letty. Her mistress seemed harder to please than usual, and more doubtful of humour than ever before. This may have arisen—but I doubt it—from the fact that, having gone to church the Sunday before they left, she had there heard a different sort of sermon from any she had heard in her life before: sermons have something to do with the history of the world, however many of them may be no better than a withered leaf in the blast.

The morning after her arrival, Hesper, happening to find herself in want of Mary's immediate help, instead of calling her as she generally did, opened the door between their rooms, and saw Mary on her knees by her bedside. Now Hesper had heard of saying prayers—night and morning both, and, when a child, had been expected, and indeed compelled to say her prayers; but to be found on one's knees in the middle of the day, looked to her a thing exceedingly odd. Mary, in truth, was not much in the way of kneeling at such a time: she had to pray much too often to kneel always, and God was too

near her, wherever she happened to be, for the fancy that she must seek him in any particular place; but so it happened now. She rose, a little startled rather than troubled, and followed her mistress into her room.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you, Mary," said Hesper, herself a little annoyed, it is not quite easy to say why; "but people do not generally say their prayers in the middle of the day."

"I say mine when I need to say them," answered Mary, a little cross that Hesper should take any notice. She would rather the thing had not occurred, and it was worse to have to talk about it.

"For my part, I don't see any good in being righteous overmuch," said Hesper.

I wonder if there was another saying in the Bible she would have been so ready to quote!

"I don't know what that means," returned Mary. "I believe it is somewhere in the Bible, but I am sure Jesus never said it, for he tells us to be righteous as our Father in heaven is righteous."

"But the thing is impossible," said Hesper. "How is one with such claims on her as I have, to attend to these things! Society has claims: no one denies that."

"And has God none?" asked Mary.

"Many people think now there is no God at all," returned Hesper, with an almost petulant expression.

"If there is no God, that settles the question," answered Mary. "But if there should be one, how then?"

"Then I am sure he would never be hard on one like me. I do just like other people. One must do as people do. If there is one thing that must be avoided more than another, it is peculiarity. How ridiculous it would be of any one to set herself against society!"

"Then you think the judge will be satisfied if you

say, 'Lord, I had so many names in my visiting-book, and so many invitations I could not refuse, that it was impossible for me to attend to those things'?"

"I don't see that I'm at all worse than other people," persisted Hesper. "I can't go and pretend to be sorry for sins I should commit again the next time there was a necessity. I don't see what I've got to repent of."

Nothing had been said about repentance: here I imagine the sermon may have come in.

"Then of course you can't repent," said Mary.

Hesper recovered herself a little.

"I am glad you see the thing as I do," she said.

"I don't see it at all as you do, ma'am," answered Mary, gently.

"Why!" exclaimed Hesper, taken by surprise, "what have I got to repent of?"

"Do you really want me to say what I think?" asked Mary.

"Of course I do," returned Hesper, getting angry, and at the same time uneasy: she knew Mary's freedom of speech upon occasion, but felt that to draw back would be to yield the point. "What have I done to be ashamed of, pray?"

Some ladies are ready to plume themselves upon not having been guilty of certain great crimes. Some thieves, I daresay, console themselves that they have never committed murder.

"If I had married a man I did not love," answered Mary, "I should be more ashamed of myself than I can tell."

"That is the way of looking at such things in the class you belong to, I daresay," rejoined Hesper; "but with us it is quite different. There is no necessity laid upon *you*. *Our* position obliges us."

"But what if God should not see it as you do?"

"If that is all you have got to bring against me!—" said Hesper, with a forced laugh.

"But that is not all," replied Mary. "When you married, you promised many things, not one of which you have ever done."

"Really, Mary, this is intolerable!" cried Hesper.

"I am only doing what you asked me, ma'am," said Mary. "And I have said nothing that every one about Mr. Redmain does not know as well as I do."

Hesper wished heartily she had never challenged Mary's judgment.

"But," she resumed, more quietly, "how could you, how could any one, how could God himself, hard as he is, ask me to fulfil the part of a loving wife to a man like Mr. Redmain?—There is no use mincing matters with *you*, Mary."

"But you promised," persisted Mary. "It belongs besides to the very idea of marriage."

"There are a thousand promises made every day which nobody is expected to keep. It is the custom, the way of the world! How many of the clergy, now, believe the things they put their names to?"

"They must answer for themselves. We are not clergymen, but women, who ought never to say a thing except we mean it, and, when we have said it, to stick to it."

"But just look around you, and see how many there are in precisely the same position! Will you dare to say they are all going to be lost because they do not behave like angels to their brutes of husbands?"

"I say, they have got to repent of behaving to their husbands as their husbands behave to them."

"And what if they don't?"

Mary paused a little.

"Do you expect to go to heaven, ma'am?" she asked.

"I hope so."

"Do you think you will like it?"

"I must say, I think it will be rather dull."

"Then, to use your own word, you must be very like lost any way. There does not seem to be a right place for you anywhere, and that is very like being lost—is it not?"

Hesper laughed.

"I am pretty comfortable where I am," she said.

"Husband and all!" thought Mary, but she did not say that. What she did say was,—

"But you know you can't stay here. God is not going to keep up this way of things for you: can you ask it, seeing you don't care a straw what he wants of you? But I have sometimes thought—what if hell be just a place where God gives everybody everything she wants, and lets everybody do whatever she likes, without once coming nigh to interfere! What a hell that would be! For God's presence in the very being, and nothing else, is bliss. That then would be altogether the opposite of heaven, and very much the opposite of this world. Such a hell would go on, I suppose, till every one had learned to hate every one else in the same world with her."

This was beyond Hesper, and she paid no attention to it.

"You can never, in your sober senses, Mary," she said, "mean that God requires of me to do things for Mr. Redmain that the servants can do a great deal better! That would be ridiculous—not to mention that I oughtn't and couldn't and wouldn't do them for any man!"

"Many a woman," said Mary, with a solemnity in her

tone which she did not intend to appear there, "has done many more trying things for persons of whom she knew nothing."

"I daresay! But such women go in for being saints, and that is not my line. I was not made for that."

"You were made for that, and far more," said Mary.

"There are such women, I know," persisted Hesper; "but I do not know how they find it possible."

"I can tell you how they find it possible. They love every human being just because he is human. Your husband might be a demon from the way you behave to him."

"I suppose *you* find it agreeable to wait upon him: he is civil to you, I daresay!"

"Not very," replied Mary, with a smile; "but the person who cannot bear with a sick man or a baby, is not fit to be a woman."

"You may go to your own room," said Hesper.

For the first time, a feeling of dislike to Mary awoke in the bosom of her mistress—very naturally, *all* my readers will allow. The next few days she scarcely spoke to her, sending directions for her work through Sepia, who discharged the office with dignity.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HELPER.

At length one morning, when she believed Mrs. Redmain would not rise before noon, Mary felt she must go and see Letty. She did not find her in the quarters where she had left her, but a story higher, in a mean room,

sitting with her hands in her lap. She did not lift her eyes when Mary entered: where hope is dead, curiosity dies. Not until she had come quite near did she raise her head, and then she seemed to know nothing of her. When she did recognize her, she held out her hand in a mechanical way, as if they were two spectres met in a miserable dream, in which they were nothing to each other, and neither could do, or cared to do, anything for the other.

“My poor Letty!” cried Mary, greatly shocked, “what has come to you? Are you not glad to see me? Has anything happened to Tom?”

She broke into a low, childish wail, and for a time that was all Mary heard. Presently, however, she became aware of a feeble moaning in the adjoining chamber, the sound of a human sea in trouble—mixed with a wandering babble, which to Letty was but as the voice of her own despair, and to Mary was a cry for help. She abandoned the attempt to draw anything from Letty, and went into the next room, the door of which stood wide. There lay Tom, but so changed that Mary took a moment to be certain it was he. Going softly to him, she laid her hand on his head. It was burning. He opened his eyes, but she saw their sense was gone. She went back to Letty, and sitting down beside her, put her arm about her, and said,—

“Why didn’t you send for me, Letty? I would have come to you at once. I will come now, to-night, and help you to nurse him. Where is the baby?”

Letty gave a shriek, and starting from her chair, walked wildly about the room, wringing her hands. Mary went after her, and taking her in her arms, said,—

“Letty, dear, has God taken your baby?”

Letty gave her a lack-lustre look.

"Then," said Mary, "he is not far away, for we are all in God's arms."

But what is the use of the most sovereign of medicines, while they stand on the sick man's table? What is the mightiest of truths so long as it is not believed? The spiritually sick still mocks at the medicine offered; he will not know its cure. Mary saw that, for any comfort to Letty, God was nowhere. It went to her very heart. Death and desolation and the enemy were in possession. She turned to go, that she might return able to begin her contest with ruin. Letty saw that she was going, and imagined her offended, and abandoning her to her misery. She flew to her, stretching out her arms like a child, but was so feeble that she tripped and fell. Mary lifted her, and laid her wailing on her couch.

"Letty," said Mary, "you didn't think I was going to leave you! But I must go for an hour, perhaps two, to make arrangements for staying with you till Tom is over the worst."

Then Letty clasped her hands in her old beseeching way, and looked up with a faint show of comfort.

"Be courageous, Letty," said Mary. "I shall be back as soon as ever I can. God has sent me to you."

She drove straight home, and heard that Mrs. Redmain was annoyed that she had gone out.

"I offered to dress her," said Jemima; "and she knows I can quite well; but she would not get up till you came, and made me fetch her a book. So there she is, a waiting for you!"

"I am sorry," said Mary; "but I had to go, and she was fast asleep."

When she entered her room, Hesper gave her a cold glance over the top of her novel, and went on with her reading. Mary proceeded to get her things ready for

dressing. But by this time she had got interested in the story.

"I shall not get up yet," she said.

"Then, please, ma'am," replied Mary, "would you mind letting Jemima dress you? I want to go out again, and should be glad if you could do without me for some days. My friend's baby is dead, and both she and her husband are very ill."

Hesper threw down her book, and her eyes flamed.

"What do you mean by using me so, Miss Marston?" she said.

"I am very sorry to put you to inconvenience," answered Mary; "but the husband seems dying, and the wife is scarcely able to crawl."

"I have nothing to do with it," interrupted Hesper. "When you made it necessary for me to part with my maid, you undertook to perform her duties. I did not engage you as a sick-nurse for other people."

"No, ma'am," replied Mary; "but this is an extreme case, and I cannot believe you will object to my going."

"I do object. How, pray, is the world to go on, if this kind of thing be permitted! I may be going out to dinner, or to the opera to-night, for anything you know, and who is there to dress me? No; on principle, and for the sake of example, I will not let you go."

"I thought," said Mary, not a little disappointed in Hesper, "I did not stand to you quite in the relation of an ordinary servant."

"Certainly you do not: I look for a little more devotion from you than from a common, ungrateful creature who thinks only of herself. But you are all alike."

More and more distressed to find one she had loved so long show herself so selfish, Mary's indignation had

almost got the better of her. But a little heightening of her colour was all the show it made.

"Indeed, it is quite necessary, ma'am," she persisted, "that I should go."

"The law has fortunately made provision against such behaviour," said Hesper. "You cannot leave without giving me a month's notice."

"The understanding on which I came to you was very different," said Mary sadly.

"It was; but, since, then, you consented to become my maid."

"It is ungenerous to take advantage of that," returned Mary, growing angry again.

"I have to protect myself, and the world in general, from the consequences that must follow, were such lawless behaviour allowed to pass."

Hesper spoke with calm severity, and Mary, making up her mind, answered now with almost equal calmness.

"The law was made for both sides, ma'am; and as you bring the law to me, I will take refuge in the law. It is, I believe, a month's warning or a month's wages; and as I have never had any wages, I imagine I am at liberty to go. Good-bye, ma'am."

Hesper made her no answer, and Mary left the room. She went to her own, stuffed her immediate necessities into a bag, let herself out of the house, called a cab, and with a great lump in her throat, drove to the help of Letty.

First she had a talk with the landlady, and learned all she could tell. Then she went up, and began to make things as comfortable as she could: all was in sad disorder and neglect.

With the mere inauguration of cleanliness, and the

first dawn of coming order, the courage of Letty began to revive a little. The impossibility of doing all that ought to be done, had, in her miserable weakness, so depressed her, that she had not done even as much as she could—except where Tom was immediately concerned: there she had not failed of her utmost.

Mary next went to the doctor to get instructions, and then to buy what things were most wanted. And now she almost wished Mrs. Redmain had paid her for her services, for she must write to Mr. Turnbull for money, and that she disliked. But by the very next post she received, enclosed in a business memorandum in George's writing, the cheque for fifty pounds she had requested.

She did not dare write to Tom's mother, because she was certain, were she to come up, her presence would only add to the misery, and take away half the probability of his recovery and of Letty's too. In the case of both, nourishment was the main thing; and to the fit providing and the administering of it, she bent her energy.

For a day or two, she felt at times as if she could hardly get through what she had undertaken; but she soon learned to drop asleep at any moment, and wake immediately when she was wanted; and thereafter her strength was by no means so sorely tried.

Under her skilful nursing,—skilful, not from experience, but simply from her faith, whence came both conscience of and capacity for doing what the doctor told her,—things went well. It is from their want of this faith, and their consequent arrogance and conceit, that the ladies who aspire to help in hospitals give the doctors so much trouble: they have not yet learned *obedience*, the only path to any good, the one essential to the saving of the world. One who cannot obey is the merest slave—

essentially and in himself a slave. The crisis of Tom's fever was at length favourably passed, but the result remained doubtful. By late hours and strong drink, he had done not a little to weaken a constitution in itself, as I have said, far from strong; while the unrest of what is commonly and foolishly called a bad conscience, with misery over the death of his child and the conduct which had disgraced him in his own eyes and ruined his wife's happiness, combined to retard his recovery.

While he was yet delirious, and grief and shame and consternation operated at will on his poetic nature, the things he kept saying over and over were very pitiful; but they would have sounded more miserable by much in the ears of one who did not look so far ahead as Mary. She, trained to regard all things in their true import, was rejoiced to find him loathing his former self, and beyond the present suffering saw the gladness at hand for the sorrowful man, the repenting sinner. Had she been mother or sister to him, she could hardly have waited on him with more devotion or tenderness.

One day, as his wife was doing some little thing for him, he took her hand in his feeble grasp, and pressing it to his face, wet with the tears of reviving manhood, said,—

"We might have been happy together, Letty, if I had but known how much you were worth, and how little I was worth myself!—Oh me! oh me!"

He burst into an uncontrollable wail that tortured Letty with its likeness to the crying of her baby.

"Tom! my own darling Tom!" she cried, "when you speak as if I belonged to you, it makes me as happy as a queen. When you are better, you will be happy too, dear. Mary says you will."

"Oh, Letty!" he sobbed, "—the baby!"

"The baby's all right, Mary says; and, some day, she says, he will run into your arms, and know you for his father."

"And I shall be ashamed to look at him!" said Tom.

An hour or so after, he woke from a short sleep, and his eyes sought Letty's watching face.

"I have seen baby," he said, "and he has forgiven me.—I daresay it was only a dream," he added, "but somehow it makes me happier. At least, I know how the thing might be."

"It was true, whether it was but a dream, or something more," said Mary, who happened to be by.

"Thank you, Mary," he returned. "You and Letty have saved me from what I dare not think of! I could die happy now—if it weren't for one thing."

"What is that?" asked Mary.

"I am ashamed to say," he replied; "but I ought to say it, and bear the shame, for the man who does shamefully ought to be ashamed. It is that, when I am in my grave—or somewhere else, for I know Mary does not like people to talk about being in their graves—you say it is heathenish, don't you, Mary?—when I am where they can't find me, then, it is horrid to think that people up here will have a hold on me and a right over me still, because of debts I shall never be able to pay them."

"Don't be too sure of that, Tom," said Mary cheerfully. "I think you will pay them yet.—But I have heard it said," she went on, "that a man in debt never tells the truth about his debts—as if he had only the face to make them, not to talk about them: can you make a clean breast of it, Tom?"

"I don't exactly know what they are; but I always did mean to pay them, and I have some idea about

them. I don't think they would come to more than a hundred pounds."

"Your mother would not hesitate to pay that for you?" said Mary.

"I know she wouldn't; but then I'm thinking of Letty."

He paused, and Mary waited.

"You know when I am gone," he resumed, "there will be nothing for her but go to my mother; and it breaks my heart to think of. Every sin of mine she will lay to her charge; and how am I to lie still in my grave—oh, I beg your pardon, Mary."

"I will pay your debts, Tom, and gladly," said Mary, "if they don't come to much more than you say—than you *think*, I mean."

"But, don't you see, Mary, that would only be a shifting of my debt from them to you? Except for Letty, it would not make the thing any better."

"What!" said Mary, "is there no difference between owing a thing to one who loves you, and one who does not? to one who would always be wishing you had paid him, and one who is glad to have even the poor bond of a debt between you and her? All of us who are sorry for our sins, are brothers and sisters."

"Oh Mary!" said Tom.

"But I will tell you what will be better: let your mother pay your debts, and I will look after Letty. I will care for her like my own sister, Tom."

"Then I shall die happy," said Tom; and from that day began to recover.

Many who would pay money to keep a man alive, or to deliver him from pain, would pay nothing to take a killing load off the shoulders of his mind. Hunger they can pity—not mental misery.

Tom would not hear of his mother being written to.

"I have done Letty wrong enough already," he said, "without subjecting her to the cruel tongue of my mother. I have conscience enough left not to have anybody else abuse her."

"But, Tom," expostulated Mary, "if you want to be good, one of your first duties is to be reconciled to your mother."

"I am very sorry things are all wrong between us, Mary," said Tom. "But if you want her to come here, you don't know what you are talking about. She must have everything her own way, or storm from morning to night. I would gladly make it up with her, but live with her, or die with her, I could *not*. To make either possible, you must convert her too.—When you have done that, I will invite her at once."

"Never mind me, Tom," said Letty. "So long as you love me, I don't care what even your mother thinks of me. I will do everything I can to make her comfortable, and satisfied with me."

"Wait till I am better anyhow, Letty; for I solemnly assure you I haven't a chance if my mother comes.—I will tell you what, Mary: I promise you, if I get better, I will do what is possible to be a son to my mother; and for the present I will dictate a letter, if you will write it, bidding her good-bye, and asking her pardon for everything I have done wrong by her, which you will please send if I should die. I cannot, and I will not promise more."

He was excited and exhausted, and Mary dared not say another word. Nor truly did she at the moment see what more could be said. Where all relation has been perverted, things cannot be set right by force. Perhaps all we can do sometimes is to be willing and wait.

The letter was dictated and written—a lovely one Mary thought, and it made her weep as she wrote it. Tom signed it with his own hand. Mary folded, sealed, addressed it, and laid it away in her desk.

The same evening Tom said to Letty, putting his thin, long hand in hers,—

“Mary thinks we shall know each other there, Letty.”

“Tom!” interrupted Letty, “don’t talk like that; I *can’t* bear it. If you do, I shall die before you.”

“All I wanted to say,” persisted Tom, “was, that I should sit all day looking out for you, Letty.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE LEPER.

THE faint, sweet, luminous jar of bow and string, as betwixt them they tore the silky air into a dying sound, came hovering—neither could have said whether it was in the soul only, or there and in the outer world too.

“What is that?” said Tom.

“Mary!” Letty called into the other room, “there is our friend with the violin again! Don’t you think Tom would like to hear him?”

“Yes, I do,” answered Mary.

“Then would you mind asking him to come and play a little to us? It would do Tom good, I do think.”

Mary went up the one stair—all that now divided them, and found the musician with his sister—his half-sister she was.

“I thought we should have you in upon us!” said Ann. “Joe thinks he can play so as nobody can hear

him; and I was fool enough to let him try. I am sorry."

"I am glad," rejoined Mary, "and am come to ask him down stairs; for Mrs. Helmer and I think it will do her husband good to hear him. He is very fond of music."

"Much help music will be to him, poor young man!" said Ann scornfully.

"Wouldn't you give a sick man a flower, even if it only made him a little happier for a moment with its scent and its loveliness?" asked Mary.

"No, I wouldn't. It would only be to help the deceitful heart to be more desperately wicked."

I will not continue the conversation, although they did a little longer. Ann's father had been a preacher among the followers of Whitfield, and Ann was a follower of her father. She laid hold upon the garment of a hard master, a tyrannical God. Happy he who has learned the gospel according to Jesus, as reported by John—that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all! Happy he who finds God his refuge from all the lies that are told for him, and in his name! But it is love that saves, and not opinion that damns; and let the master himself deal with the weeds in his garden as with the tares in his field.

"I read my bible a good deal," said Mary at last, "but I never found one of those things you say in it."

"That's because you were never taught to look for them," said Ann.

"Very likely," returned Mary. "In the meantime I prefer the violin—that is, with one like your brother to play it."

She turned to the door, and Joseph Jasper, who had not spoken a word, rose and followed her. As soon as

they were outside, Mary turned to him, and begged he would play the same piece with which he had ended on the former occasion.

"I thought you did not care for it! I am so glad!" he said.

"I care for it very much," replied Mary, "and have often thought of it since. But you left in such haste! before I could find words to thank you!"

"You mean the ten lepers, don't you!" he said. "But of course you do. I always end off with them."

"Is that how you call it?" returned Mary. "Then you have given me the key to it, and I shall understand it much better this time, I hope."

"That is what I call it," said Joseph, "—to myself, I mean, not to Ann. She would count it blasphemy. God has made so many things that she thinks must not be mentioned in his hearing!"

When they entered the room, Joseph, casting a quick look round it, made at once for the darkest corner. Three swift strides took him there; and without more preamble than if he had come upon a public platform to play, he closed his eyes and began.

And now at last Mary understood at least this specimen of his strange music, and was able to fill up the blanks in the impression it formerly made upon her. Alas, that my helpless ignorance should continue to make it impossible for me to describe it!

A movement even, and rather slow, full of unexpected chords, wonderful to Mary, who did not know that such things could be made on the violin, brought before her mind's eye the man who knew all about everything, and loved a child more than a sage, walking in the hot day upon the border between Galilee and Samaria. Sounds arose which she interpreted as the stir of village life, the

crying and calling of domestic animals, and of busy housewives at their duties, carried on half out of doors, in the homeliness of country custom. Presently the instrument began to tell the gathering of a crowd, with bee-like hum, and the crossing of voice with voice—but at a distance, the sounds confused and obscure. Swiftly then they seemed to rush together, to blend and lose themselves in the unity of an imploring melody, in which she heard the words, uttered afar, with uplifted hands and voices, drawing nearer and nearer as often repeated, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” Then came a brief pause, and then what, to her now fully roused imagination, seemed the voice of the Master, saying, “Go show yourselves unto the priests.” Then followed the slow, half unwilling, not hopeful march of timeless feet; then a clang as of something broken, then a silence as of sunrise, then air and liberty—long drawn notes divided with quick hurried ones; then the trampling of many feet, going farther and farther—merrily, with dance and song; once more a sudden pause—and a melody in which she read the awe-struck joyous return of one. Steadily yet eagerly the feet drew nigh, the melody growing at once in awe and jubilation, as the man came nearer and nearer to him whose word had made him clean, until at last she saw him fall on his face before him, and heard his soul rushing forth in a strain of adoring thanks, which seemed to end only because it was choked in tears.

The violin ceased, but, as if its soul had passed from the instrument into his, the musician himself took up the strain, and in a mellow tenor voice, with a mingling of air and recitative, and an expression which to Mary was entrancing, sang the words, “And he was a Samaritan.”

At the sound of his own voice, he seemed to wake up, hung his head for a moment, as if ashamed of having

shown his emotion, tucked his instrument under his arm, and walked from the room, without a word spoken on either side. Nor, while he played, had Mary once seen the face of the man; her soul sat only in the porch of her ears, and not once looked from the windows of her eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARY AND MR. REDMAIN.

A FEW rudiments of righteousness lurked, in their original undevelopment, but still in a measure active, in the being of Mr. Redmain: there had been in the soul of his mother, I suspect, a strain of generosity, and she had left a mark of it upon him, and it was the best thing about him. But in action these rudiments took an evil shape.

Preferring inferior company, and full of that suspicion which puts the last edge upon what the world calls knowledge of human nature, he thought no man his equal in penetrating the arena of motive, and reading actions in the light of motive; and that the fundamental principle of all motive was self-interest, he assumed to be beyond dispute. With this candle, not that of the Lord, he searched the dark places of the soul; but where the soul was light, his candle could show him nothing—served only to blind him yet farther, if possible, to what was there present. And because he did not seek the good, never yet in all his life had he come near enough to a righteous man to recognize that in something or other that man was different from himself. As for women—there was his wife—of whom he was willing to think

as well as she would let him! And she, firmly did he believe, was an angel beside Sepia!—of whom, bad as she was, it is quite possible he thought yet worse than she deserved: alas for the woman who is not good, and falls under the judgment of a bad man!—the good woman he can no more hurt than the serpent can bite the adamant. He believed he knew Sepia's self, although he did not yet know her history; and he scorned her the more that he was not a hair better himself. He had regard enough for his wife, and what virtue his penetration conceded her, to hate their intimacy; and ever since his marriage had been scheming how to get rid of Sepia—only, however, through finding her out: he must unmask her: there would be no satisfaction in getting rid of her without his wife's convinced acquiescence. He had been therefore almost all the time more or less on the watch to uncover the wickedness he felt sure lay at no great depth beneath her surface; and in the meantime, and for the sake of this end, he lived on terms of decent domiciliation with her. She had no suspicion how thin was the crust between her and the lava.

In Cornwall, he began at length to puzzle himself about Mary. Of course she was just like the rest! but he did not at once succeed in fitting what he saw to what he entirely believed of her. She remained, like Sepia, a riddle to be solved. He was not so ignorant as his wife concerning the relations of the different classes, and he felt certain there must be some reason, of course a discreditable one, for her leaving her former, and taking her present position. The attack he had in Cornwall afforded him unexpected opportunity of making her out, as he called it.

Upon this occasion it was also, that Mary first ventured to expostulate with her mistress on her neglect of

her husband. She heard her patiently; and the same day going to his room, paid him some small attention—handed him his medicine, I believe, but clumsily, because ungraciously. The next moment one of his fits of pain coming on, he broke into such a torrent of cursing as swept her in stately dignity from the room. She would not go near him again.

“Brought up as you have been, Mary,” she said, “you cannot enter into the feelings of one in my position, to whom the very tone even of coarse language is unspeakably odious. It makes me sick with disgust. Coarseness is what no lady can endure. I beg you will not mention Mr. Redmain to me again.”

“Dear Mrs. Redmain,” said Mary, “ugly as such language is, there are many things worse. It seems to me worse that a wife should not go near her husband when he is suffering, than that he should in his pain speak bad words.”

She had been on the point of saying that a thin skin was not purity, but bethought herself in time.

“You are scarcely in a position to lay down the law for me, Mary,” said Hesper. “We will, if you please, drop the subject.”

Mary’s words were overheard, as was a good deal in the house more than was reckoned on, and reached Mr. Redmain, whom they perplexed: what could the young woman hope from taking his part?

One morning, after the arrival of Mewks, his man, Mary heard Mr. Redmain calling him in a tone which betrayed that he had been calling for some time: the house was an old one, and the bells were neither in good trim, nor was his in a convenient position. She thought first to find Mewks, but pity rose in her heart.

She ran to Mr. Redmain's door which stood half open, and showed herself.

"Can *I* not do something for you, sir?" she said.

"Yes, you can. Go and tell that lumbering idiot to come to me instantly. No! here you!—there's a good girl!—Oh, damn!—Just give me your hand, and help me to turn an inch or two."

Change of posture relieved him a little.

"Thank you," he said. "That is better. Wait a few moments, will you—till the rascal comes?"

Mary stood back, a little behind him, thinking not to annoy him with the sight of her.

"What are you doing there?" he cried. "I like to see what people are about in my room. Come in front here, and let me look at you."

Mary obeyed, and with a smile took the position he pointed out to her. Immediately followed another agony of pain, in which he looked beset with demons, whom he not feared, but hated. Mary hurried to him, and, in the compassion which she inherited long back of Eve, took his hand, the fingers of which were twisting themselves into shapes like tree-roots. With a hoarse roar, he dashed hers from him, as if it had been a serpent. She returned to her place, and stood.

"What did you mean by that?" he said, when he came to himself. "Do you want to make a fool of me?"

Mary did not understand him, and made no reply. Another fit came. This time she kept her distance.

"Come here," he howled; "take my head in your hands."

She obeyed.

"Damned nice hands you've got!" he gasped; "—much nicer than your mistress's."

Mary took no notice. Gently she withdrew her hands, for the fit was over.

"I see! that's the way of you!" he said, as she stepped back. "But come now, tell me how it is that a nice, well-behaved, handsome girl like you, should leave a position where, they tell me, you were your own mistress, and take a cursed place as lady's-maid to my wife."

"It was because I liked Mrs. Redmain so much," answered Mary. "But indeed I was not very comfortable where I was."

"What the devil did you see to like in her? I never saw anything!"

"She is so beautiful!" said Mary.

"Is she! ho! ho!" he laughed. "What is that to another woman! You are new to the trade, my girl, if you think that will go down! One woman taking to another because 'she's so beautiful'! Ha! ha! ha!"

He repeated Mary's words with an indescribable contempt, and his laugh was insulting to a degree; but it went off in a cry of suffering.

"Hypocrisy mustn't be too barefaced," he resumed, when again his torture abated. "I didn't make you stop to amuse me! It's little of that this beastly world has got for me! Come, a better reason for waiting on my wife?"

"That she was kind to me," said Mary, "may be a better reason, but it is not a truer."

"It's more than ever she was to me! What wages does she give you?"

"We have not spoken about that yet, sir."

"You haven't had any?"

"I haven't wanted any yet."

"Then what the deuce ever made you come to this house?"

"I hoped to be of some service to Mrs. Redmain," said Mary, growing troubled.

"And you ain't of any? Is that why you don't want wages?"

"No, sir. That is not the reason."

"Then what *is* the reason? Come! Trust me. I will be much better to you than your mistress. Out with it! I knew there was something!"

"I would rather not talk more about it," said Mary, knowing that her feeling in relation to Hesper would be altogether incredible, and the notion of it ridiculous to him.

"You needn't mind telling *me*! I know all about such things.—Look here! Give me that pocket-book on the table."

Mary brought him the pocket-book. He opened it, and taking from it some notes, held them out to her.

"If your mistress won't pay you your wages, I will. There! take that. You're quite welcome. What matter which pays you! It all comes out of the same stocking-foot."

"I don't know yet," answered Mary, "whether I shall accept wages from Mrs. Redmain. Something might happen to make it impossible; or, if I had taken money, to make me regret it."

"I like that! There you keep a hold on her!" said Mr. Redmain, in a confidential tone, while in his heart he was more puzzled than ever. "There's no occasion, though, for all that," he went on, "to go without your money when you can have it and she be nothing the wiser. There—take it. I will swear you any oath you like not to tell my stingy wife."

"She is not stingy," said Mary; "and if I don't take wages from her, I certainly shall not from any one else.—Besides," she added, "it would be dishonest."

"Oh! that's the dodge!" said Mr. Redmain to himself; but aloud, "Where would be the dishonesty, when the money is mine to do with as I please?"

"Where the dishonesty, sir!" exclaimed Mary, astounded. "To take wages from you, and pretend to Mrs. Redmain I was going without!"

"Ha! ha! The first time, no doubt, you ever pretended anything!"

"It would be," said Mary, "so far as I can, at the moment, remember."

"Go along," cried Mr. Redmain, losing, or pretending to lose patience with her; "you are too unscrupulous a liar for me to deal with."

Mary turned and left the room. As she went, his keen glance caught the expression of her countenance, and noted the indignant red that flushed her cheeks, and the lightning of wronged innocence in her eyes.

"I ought not to have said it," he remarked to himself.

He did not for a moment fancy she had spoken the truth; but the look of her went to a deeper place in him than he knew even the existence of.

"Hey! stop," he cried, as she was disappearing. "Come back, will you!"

"I will find Mr. Mewks," she answered, and went.

After this, Mary naturally dreaded conference with Mr. Redmain; and he, thinking she must have time to get over the offence he had given her, made for the present no fresh attempt to come, by her own aid, at a bird's-eye view of her character and scheme of life. His curiosity, however, being in no degree assuaged concerning the odd human animal whose spoor he had for the moment failed to track, he meditated how best to renew the attempt in London. Not small, therefore, was his annoyance to find, a few days after his arrival, that she

was no longer in the house. He questioned his wife as to the cause of her absence, and told her she was utterly heartless in refusing her leave to go and nurse her friend; whereupon Hesper, neither from desire to do right, nor from regard to her husband's opinion, but because she either saw or fancied she saw that, now Mary did not dress her, she no longer caused the same sensation on entering a room, resolved to write to her—as if taking it for granted she had meant to return as soon as she was able. And to prick the sides of this intent came another spur, as will be seen from the letter she wrote:—

“Dear Mary, can you tell me what is become of my large sapphire ring? I have never seen it since you brought my case up with you from Cornwall. I have been looking for it all the morning, but in vain. You *must* have it. I shall be lost without it, for you know it has not its equal for colour and brilliance. I do not believe you intended for a moment to keep it, but only to punish me for thinking I could do without you. If so, you have your revenge, for I find I cannot do without either of you—you or the ring; so you will not carry the joke farther than I can bear. If you cannot come at once, write and tell me it is safe, and I shall love you more than ever. I am dying to see you again. Yours faithfully, H. R.”

By this time, Letty was much better, and Tom no longer required such continuous attention; Mary therefore betook herself at once to Mr. Redmain's. Hesper was out shopping, and Mary went to her own room to wait for her, where she was glad of the opportunity of getting at some of the things she had left behind her.

While she was looking for what she wanted, Sepia entered, and was, or pretended to be, astonished to see her. In a strange sarcastic tone,—

“Ah, you there!” she said. “I hope you will find it.”

"If you mean the ring, that is not likely, Miss Yolland," Mary answered.

Sepia was silent a moment or two, then said,—

"How is your cousin?"

"I have no cousin," replied Mary.

"The person, I mean, you have been staying with?"

"Better, thank you."

"Almost a pity, is it not—if there should come trouble about this ring?"

"I do not understand you. The ring will of course be found," returned Mary.

"In any case the blame will come on you: it was in your charge."

"The ring was in the case when I left."

"You will have to prove that."

"I remember quite well."

"That no one will question."

Beginning at last to understand her insinuations, Mary was so angry that she dared not speak.

"But it will hardly go to clear you," Sepia went on. "Don't imagine I mean you have taken it; I am only warning you how the matter will look, that you may be prepared. Mr. Redmain is one to believe the worst things of the best people."

"I am obliged to you," said Mary; "but I am not anxious."

"It is necessary you should know also," continued Sepia, "that there is some suspicion attaching to a female friend of yours as well, a young woman who used to visit you—the wife of the other, it is supposed. She was here, I remember, one night there was a party: I saw you together in my cousin's bedroom. She had just dressed and gone down."

"I remember," said Mary. "It was Mrs. Helmer. Well?"

"It is very unfortunate, certainly; but the truth must be told: a few days before you left, one of the servants hearing some one in the house in the middle of the night, got up and went down, but only in time to hear the front-door open and shut. In the morning a hat was found in the drawing-room, with the name *Thomas Helmer* in it: that is the name of your friend's husband I believe?"

"I am aware Mr. Helmer was a frequent visitor," said Mary, trying to keep cool for what was to come.

This that Sepia told her was true enough, though she was not accurate as to the time of its occurrence. I will relate briefly how it came about.

Upon a certain evening, a few days before Mary's return from Cornwall, Tom would have gone to see Miss Yolland had he not known that she meant to go to the play with a Mr. Emmet, a cousin of the Redmains. Before the hour arrived however, Count Galofta called, and Sepia went out with him, telling the man who opened the door to ask Mr. Emmet to wait. The man was rather deaf, and did not catch with certainty the name she gave. Mr. Emmet did not appear, and it was late before Sepia returned.

Tom, jealous even to hatred, spent the greater part of his evening in a tavern on the borders of the city—in gloomy solitude, drinking brandy and water, and building castles of the most foolish type—for castles are as different as the men that build them. Through all the rooms of them glided the form of Sepia, his evil genius. He grew more and more excited as he built, and as he drank. He rose at last, paid his bill, and, a little suspicious of his equilibrium, stalked into the street. There almost unconsciously, he turned and walked westward.

It was getting late; before long the theatres would be emptying: he might have a peep of Sepia as she came out!—but where was the good when that fellow was with her! “But,” thought Tom, growing more and more daring as in an adventurous dream, “why should I not go to the house, and see her after he has left her at the door?”

He went to the house and rang the bell. The man came, and said immediately that Miss Yolland was out, but had desired him to ask Mr. Helmer to wait; whereupon Tom walked in, and up the stair to the drawing-room, thence into a second and a third drawing-room, and from the last into the conservatory. The man went down and finished his second pint of ale. From the conservatory, Tom, finding himself in danger of havoc among the flower-pots, turned back into the third room, threw himself on a couch, and fell fast asleep.

He woke in the middle of the night in pitch darkness; and it was some time before he could remember where he was. When he did, he recognized that he was in an awkward predicament. But he knew the house well, and would make the attempt to get out undiscovered. It was foolish, but Tom was foolish. Feeling his way, he knocked down a small table with a great crash of china, and losing his equanimity, rushed for the stair. Happily the hall-lamp was still alight, and he found no trouble with bolts or lock: the door was not any way secured.

The first breath of the cold night-air brought with it such a gush of joy as he had rarely experienced; and he trod the silent streets with something of the pleasure of an escaped criminal, until, alas, the wind at the first turning let him know that he had left his hat behind him! He felt as if he had committed a murder and left his card-case with the body. A vague terror grew upon him as he hurried along. Justice seemed following on

his track. He had found the door on the latch: if anything was missing, how should he explain the presence of his hat without his own? The devil of the brandy he had drunk was gone out of him, and only the gray ashes of its evil fire were left in his sick brain, but it had helped first to kindle another fire, which was now beginning to glow unsuspected—that of a fever whose fuel had been slowly gathering for some time.

He opened the door with his pass-key, and hurried up the stair, his long legs taking three steps at a time. Never before had he felt as if he were fleeing to a refuge when going home to his wife.

He opened the door of the sitting-room—and there on the floor lay Letty and little Tom, as I have already told.

“Why have I heard nothing of this before?” said Mary.

“I am not aware of any right you have to know what happens in this house.”

“Not from you, of course, Miss Yolland—perhaps not from Mrs Redmain; but the servants talk of most things, and I have not heard a word—”

“How could you,” interrupted Sepia, “when you were not in the house?—And so long as nothing was missed, the thing was of no consequence,” she added. “Now it is different.”

This confused Mary a little. She stopped to consider. One thing was clear—that, if the ring was not lost till after she left—and of so much she was sure—it could not be Tom that had taken it, for he was then ill in bed. Something to this effect she managed to say.

“I told you already,” returned Sepia, “that I had no suspicion of him—at least, I desire to have none, but you may be required to prove all you say; and it is as well to let you understand—though there is no reason

why *I* should take the trouble—that your going to those very people at the time, and their proving to be friends of yours, adds to the difficulty.”

“How?” asked Mary.

“I am not on the jury,” replied Sepia with indifference.

The scope of her remarks seemed to Mary intended to show that any suspicion of her would only be natural. For the moment the idea amused her. But Sepia’s way of talking about Tom, whatever she meant by it, was disgraceful!

“I am astonished you should seem so indifferent,” she said, “if the character of a gentleman with whom you have been so intimate is so seriously threatened as you would imply. I know he has been to see you more than once while Mr. and Mrs. Redmain were not yet returned.”

Sepia’s countenance changed; an evil fire glowed in her eyes, and she looked at Mary as if she would search her to the bone. The poorer the character, the more precious the repute!

“The foolish fellow,” she returned, with a smile of contempt, “chose to fall in love with me!—A married man too!”

“If you understood that, how did he come to be here so often?” asked Mary, looking her in the face.

But Sepia knew better than declare war a moment before it was unavoidable.

“Have I not just told you,” she said, in a haughty tone, “that the man was in love with me?”

“And have you not just told me he was a married man? Could he have come to the house so often without at least your permission?”

Mary was actually taking the upper hand with her! Sepia felt it with scarce repressible rage.

"He deserved the punishment," she replied with calmness.

"You do not seem to have thought of his wife!"

"Certainly not. She never gave me offence."

"Is offence the only ground for casting a regard on a fellow-creature?"

"Why should I think of her?"

"Because she was your neighbour, and you were doing her a wrong."

"Once for all, Marston," cried Sepia, overcome at last, "this kind of thing will not do with me. I may not be a saint, but I have honesty enough to know the genuine thing from humbug. You have thrown dust in a good many eyes in this house, but *none* in mine."

By this time Mary had got her temper quite in hand, taking a lesson from the serpent, who will often keep his when the dove loses hers. She hardly knew what fear was, for she had in her something a little stronger than what generally goes by the name of faith. She was therefore able to see that she ought, if possible, to learn Sepia's object in talking thus to her.

"Why do you say all this to me?" she asked quietly. "I cannot flatter myself it is from friendship."

"Certainly not. But the motive may be worthy for all that. You are not the only one involved. People who would pass for better than their neighbours will never believe any good purpose in one who does not choose to talk their slang."

Sepia had repressed her rage, and through it looked aggrieved. "She confesses to a purpose," said Mary to herself, and waited.

"They are not all villains who are not saints," Sepia went on. "—This man's wife is your friend?"

"She is."

"Well, the man himself is my friend—in a sort of a sense."

A strange shiver went through Mary, and seemed to make her angry. Sepia went on.

"I confess I allowed the poor boy—he is little more—to talk foolishly to me. I was amused at first, but perhaps I have not quite escaped unhurt; and, as a woman, you must understand that when a woman has once felt in that way, if but for a moment, she would at least be—sorry—" Here her voice faltered, and she did not finish the sentence, but began afresh.—"What I want of you is, through his wife, or any way you think best, to let the poor fellow know he had better slip away—to France, say—and stop there till the thing blow over."

"But why should you imagine he has had anything to do with the matter? The ring will be found, and then the hat will not signify."

"Well," replied Sepia, putting on an air of openness, and for that sake an air of familiarity, "I see I must tell you the whole truth. I never did for a moment believe Mr. Helmer had anything to do with the business, though when you put me out of temper, I pretended to believe it, and that you were in it as well: that was mere irritation. But there is sure to be trouble; for my cousin is miserable about her sapphire, which she values more than anything she has; and if it is not found, the affair will be put into the hands of the police, and then what will become of poor Mr. Helmer, be he as innocent as you and I believe him! Even if the judge should declare that he leaves the court without a blot on his character, Newgate mud is sure to stick, and he will be *half* looked upon as a thief for the rest of his days: the world is so unjust. Nor is that all; for they will put you in the witness-box, and make you confess the man an old friend

of yours from the same part of the country; whereupon the counsel for the prosecution will not fail to hint that you ought to be standing beside the accused. Believe me, Mary, that, if Mr. Helmer is taken up for this, you will not come out of it clean."

"Still you explain nothing," said Mary. "You would not have me believe it is for my sake you are giving yourself all this trouble?"

"No. But I thought you would see where I was leading you. For—and now for the *whole* truth—although nothing can touch the character of one in my position, it would be worse than awkward for me to be spoken of in connexion with the poor fellow's visits to the house: *my* honesty would not be called in question as yours would, but what is dear to me as my honesty might—nay, it certainly would. You see now why I came to you!—You must go to his wife, or, better still, to Mr. Helmer himself, and tell him what I have been saying to you. He will at once see the necessity of disappearing for a while."

Mary had listened attentively. She could not help fearing that something worse than unpleasant might be at hand; but she did not believe in Sepia, and in no case could consent that Tom should compromise himself. Danger of this kind must be met, not avoided. Still, whatever could be done, ought to be done to protect him, especially in his present critical state. A breath of such a suspicion as this reaching him might be the death of him, and of Letty too.

"I will think over what you have said," she answered; "but I cannot give him the advice you wish me. What I shall do I cannot say—the thing has come upon me with such a shock."

"You have no choice that I see," said Sepia. "It is either what I propose, or ruin. I give you fair warning that I will stick at nothing where my reputation is concerned. You and yours shall be trod in the dirt before I allow a spot on my character."

To Mary's relief they were here interrupted by the hurried entrance of Mrs. Redmain. She almost ran up to her, and took her by both hands.

"You dear creature! You have brought me my ring!" she cried.

Mary shook her head with a little sigh.

"But you have come to tell me where it is?"

"Alas, no, dear Mrs. Redmain!" said Mary.

"Then you must find it," she said, and turned away with an ominous-looking frown.

"I will do all I can to help you find it."

"Oh, you *must* find it! My jewel-case was in your charge."

"But there has been time to lose every thing in it, the one after the other, since I gave it up. The sapphire ring was there, I know, when I went."

"That cannot be. You gave me the box, and I put it away myself, and the next time I looked in it, it was not there."

"I wish I had asked you to open it when I gave it you," said Mary.

"I wish you had," said Hesper. "But the ring must be found, or I shall send for the police."

"I will not make matters worse, Mrs. Redmain," said Mary, with as much calmness as she could assume, and much was needed, "by pointing out what your words imply. If you really mean what you say, it is I who must insist on the police being sent for."

"I am sure, Mary," said Sepia, speaking for the first

time since Hesper's entrance, "that your mistress has no intention of accusing you."

"Of course not," said Hesper; "only what am I to do? I must have my ring. Why did you come, if you had nothing to tell me about it?"

"How could I stay away when you were in trouble? Have you searched everywhere?"

"Everywhere I can think of."

"Would you like me to help you look? I feel certain it will be found."

"No, thank you. I am sick of looking."

"Shall I go then?—What would you like me to do?"

"Go to your room, and wait till I send for you."

"I must not be long away from my invalids," said Mary, as cheerfully as she could.

"Oh, indeed! I thought you had come back to your work!"

"I did not understand from your letter you wished that, ma'am—though indeed I could not have come just yet in any case."

"Then you mean to go, and leave things just as they are?"

"I am afraid there is no help for it. If I could do anything—. But I will call again to-morrow, and every day till the ring is found, if you like."

"Thank you," said Hesper, dryly; "I don't think that would be of much use."

"I will call anyhow," returned Mary, "and inquire whether you would like to see me.—I will go to my room now, and while I wait will get some things I want."

"As you please," said Hesper.

Scarcely was Mary in her room, however, when she

heard the door, which had the trick of falling-to of itself, closed and locked, and knew that she was a prisoner. For one moment a frenzy of anger overcame her; the next, she remembered where her life was hid, knew that nothing could touch her, and was calm. While she took from her drawers the things she wanted, and put them in her hand-bag, she heard the door unlocked, but as no one entered, she sat down to wait what would next arrive.

Mrs. Redmain, as soon as she was aware of her loss, had gone in her distress to tell her husband, whose gift the ring had been. Unlike his usual self, he had showed interest in the affair. She attributed this to the value of the jewel, and the fact that he had himself chosen it: he was rather, and thought himself very, knowing in stones; and the sapphire was in truth a most rare one; but it was for quite other reasons that Mr. Redmain cared about its loss: it would, he hoped, like the famous carbuncle, cast a light all round it.

He was as yet by no means well, and had not been from the house since his return.

The moment Mary was out of the room, Hesper rose.

"I should be a fool to let her leave the house," she said.

"Hesper, you will do nothing but mischief," cried Sepia.

Hesper paid no attention, but going after Mary, locked the door of her room, and running to her husband's, told him she had made her a prisoner.

No sooner was she in her husband's room than Sepia hastened to unlock Mary's door; but just as she did so, she heard some one on the stair above, and retreated without going in. She would then have turned the key

again, but now she heard steps on the stair below, and once more withdrew.

Mary heard a knock at her door. Mewks entered. He brought a request from his master that she would go to his room.

She rose and went, taking her bag with her.

"You may go now, Mrs. Redmain," said her husband when Mary entered. "Get out, Mewks," he added; and both lady and valet disappeared.

"So!" he said, with a grin of pleasure. "Here's a pretty business! You may sit down though. You haven't got the ring in that bag there?"

"Nor anywhere else, sir," answered Mary. "Shall I shake it out on the floor?—or on the sofa would be better."

"Nonsense! You don't imagine me such a fool as to suppose, if you had it, you would carry it about in your bag!"

"You don't believe I have it, sir—do you?" she returned, in a tone of appeal.

"How am I to know what to believe? There is something dubious about you—you have yourself all but admitted that: how am I to know that robbery mayn't be your little dodge? All that rubbish you talked down at Lychford about honesty, and taking no wages, and loving your mistress, and all that rot, looks devilish like something off the square! That ring, now, the stone of it alone, is worth seven hundred pounds: one might let pretty good wages go for a chance like that!"

Mary looked him in the face, and made him no answer. He spied a danger: if he irritated her, he would get nothing out of her!

"My girl," he said, changing his tone, "I believe you know nothing about the ring; I was only teasing you."

Mary could not help a sigh of relief, and her eyes

fell, for she felt them beginning to fill. She could not have believed that the judgment of such a man would ever be of consequence to her. But the unity of the race is a thing that cannot be broken.

Now although Mr. Redmain was by no means so sure of her innocence as he had pretended, he did at least wish and hope to find her innocent—from no regard for her, but because there was another he would be more glad to find concerned in the ugly affair.

“Mrs. Redmain,” he went on, “would have me hand you over to the police; but I won’t. You may go home when you please, and you need fear nothing.”

He had the house where the Helmers lodged already watched, and knew this much, that some one was ill there, and that the doctor came almost every day.

“I certainly shall fear nothing,” said Mary, not quite trusting him: “my fate is in God’s hands.”

“We know all about that,” said Mr. Redmain: “I’m up to most dodges. But look here, my girl: it wouldn’t be prudent in me, lest there should be such a personage as you have just mentioned, to be hard upon any of my fellow-creatures: I am one day pretty sure to be in misfortune myself. You mightn’t think it of me, but I am not quite a heathen, and do reflect a little at times. You may be as wicked as myself, or as good as Joseph, for anything I know or care, for, as I say, it ain’t my business to judge you. Tell me now what you are up to, and I will make it the better for you.”

Mary had been trying hard to get at what he was “up to,” but found herself quite bewildered.

“I am sorry, sir,” she faltered, “but I haven’t the slightest idea what you mean.”

“Then you go home,” he said. “I will send for you when I want you.”

The moment she was out of the room, he rang his bell violently. Mewks appeared.

"Go after that young woman—do you hear? You know her—Miss—damn it, what's her name?—Harland or Cranston, or—oh, hang it! you know well enough, you rascal!"

"Do you mean Miss Marston, sir?"

"Of course I do! Why didn't you say so before? Go after her, I tell you; and make haste. If she goes straight home—you know where—come back as soon as she's inside the door."

"Yes, sir."

"Damn you, go, or you'll lose sight of her."

"I'm a listenin' after the street-door, sir. It ain't gone yet. There it is now!"

And with the word he left the room.

Mary was too much absorbed in her own thoughts to note that she was followed by a man with the collar of his greatcoat up to his eyes, and a woollen comforter round his face. She walked on steadily for home, scarce seeing the people that passed her. It was clear to Mewks that she had not a suspicion of being kept in sight. He saw her in at her own door, and went back to his master.

CHAPTER XVII.

JOSEPH JASPER.

ANOTHER fact Mewks carried to his master—namely, that, as Mary came near the door of the house, she was met by “a rough-looking man,” who came walking slowly along, as if he had been going up and down waiting for her. He made her an awkward bow as she drew near, and she stopped and had a long conversation with him—such at least it seemed to Mewks, annoyed that he could hear nothing of it, and fearful of attracting their attention—after which the man went away, and Mary went into the house. This report made his master grin, for, through the description Mewks gave, he suspected a thief disguised as a workman; but his hopes being against the supposition, he dwelt the less upon it.

The man who stopped Mary, and whom indeed she would have stopped, was Joseph Jasper, the blacksmith. That he was rough in appearance no one who knew him would have wished himself able to deny, and one less like a thief would have been hard to find. His hands were very rough and ingrained with black; his fingers were long, but chopped off square at the points, and had no resemblance to the long tapering fingers of an artist or pickpocket. His clothes were of corduroy, not *very* grimy, because of the huge apron of thick leather he wore at his work, but they looked none the better that he had topped them with his tall Sunday hat. His complexion was a mixture of brown and browner; his black eyebrows hung far over the blackest of eyes, the brightest flashing of which was never seen, because all the time he

played he kept them closed tight. His face wore its natural clothing—a moustache thick and well-shaped, and a beard not too large, of a colour that looked like black burned brown. His hair was black and curled all over his head. His whole appearance was that of a workman; a careless glance could never have suspected him a poet-musician; as little could even such a glance have failed to see in him an honest man. He was powerfully built, over the middle height, but not tall. He spoke very fair old-fashioned English, with the Yorkshire tone and turn. His walk was rather plodding, and his movements slow and stiff; but in communion with his violin they were free enough, and the more delicate for the strength that was in them; at the anvil they were as supple as powerful. On his face dwelt an expression that was not to be read by the indifferent—a waiting in the midst of work, as of a man to whom the sense of the temporary was always present, but present with the constant reminder that, just therefore, work must be as good as work can be, that things may last their due time.

The following was the conversation concerning the purport of which Mewks was left to what conjecture was possible to a serving-man of his stamp.

Mary held out her hand to Jasper, and it disappeared in his. He held it for a moment with a great but gentle grasp, and as he let it go, said,—

“I took the liberty of watching for you, miss. I wanted to ask a favour of you. It seemed to me you would take no offence.”

“You might be sure of that,” Mary answered. “You have a right to anything I can do for you.”

He fixed his gaze on her for a moment, as if he did not understand her.

“That’s where it is,” he said: “I’ve *done* nothing for

your people. It's all very well to go playing and playing, but that's not doing anything; and if *he* had done nothing, there would ha' been no fiddling. You understand me, miss, I know: work comes before music, and makes the soul of it; it's not the music that makes the doing. I'm a poor hand at saying without my fiddle, miss: you'll excuse me."

Mary's heart was throbbing. She had not heard a word like this—not since her father went to what people call the "long home"—as if a home could be too long! What do we want but an endless home?—only it is not the grave! She felt as if the spirit of her father had descended on the strange workman, and had sent him to her. She looked at him with shining eyes, and did not speak. He resumed, as fearing he had not conveyed his thought.

"What I think I mean is, miss, that, if the working of miracles in his name wouldn't do it, it's not likely playing the fiddle will."

"Oh, I understand you so well!" said Mary, in a voice hardly her own, "—so well! It makes me happy to hear you! Tell me what I can do for you."

"The poor gentleman in there must want all the help you can give him, and more. There must be something left, surely, for a man to do. He must want lifting at times, for instance, and that's not fit for either of you ladies."

"Thank you," said Mary heartily. "I will mention it to Mrs. Helmer, and I am sure she will be very glad of your help sometimes."

"Couldn't you ask her now, miss? I should like to know at what hour I might call. But perhaps the best way would be to walk about here in the evening, after my day's work is over, and then you could run down any

time, and look out: that would be enough; I should be there. Saturday nights I could just as well be there all night."

To Tom and Letty, it seemed not a little peculiar that a man so much a stranger should be ready to walk about the street in order to be at hand with help for them; but Mary was only delighted, not surprised, for what the man had said to her made the thing not merely intelligible, but absolutely reasonable.

Joseph was not, however, allowed to wander the street. The arrangement made was, that, as soon as his work was over, he should come and see whether there was anything he could do for them. And he never came but there was plenty to do. He took a lodging close by, that he might be with them earlier, and stay later; and when nothing else was wanted of him, he was always ready to discourse on his violin. Sometimes Tom enjoyed his music much, though he found no little fault with his mode of playing, for Tom knew something about everything, and could render many a reason; at other times, he preferred having Mary read to him.

On one of these latter occasions, Mary, occupied in cooking something for the invalid, asked Joseph to read for her. He consented, but read very badly—as if he had no understanding of the words, but, on the other hand, stopping every few lines, apparently to think, and master what he had read. This was not good reading any way, least of all for an invalid who required the soothing of half-thought, molten and diluted in sweet, even, monotonous sound, and it was long before Mary asked him again.

Many things showed that he had had little education, and therefore probably the more might be made of him. Mary saw that he must be what men call a genius, for

his external history had been, by his own showing, of an altogether commonplace type.

His father, who was a blacksmith before him, and a local preacher, had married a second time, and Joseph was the only child of the second marriage. His father had brought him up to his own trade, and, after his death, Joseph came to work in London, whither his sister had preceded him. He was now thirty, and had from the first been saving what he could of his wages in the hope of one day having a smithy of his own, and his time more at his ordering.

Mary saw too that in his violin he possessed a grand fundamental undeveloped education; he was like a man going about the world with a ten-thousand-pound-note in his pocket, and not many sixpences to pay his way with. But there was another education working in him far deeper, and already more developed than that which divine music even was giving him; this also Mary thoroughly recognized; this it was in him that chiefly attracted her; and the man himself knew it as underlying all his consciousness.

Though he could ill read aloud, he could read well for his own inward nourishment; he could write tolerably, and if he could not spell, that mattered a straw, and no more; he had never read a play of Shakspeare—had never seen a play; knew nothing of grammar or geography—or of history, except the one history comprising all. He knew nothing of science; but he could shoe a horse as well as any man in the three Ridings, and make his violin talk about things far beyond the ken of most men of science.

So much of a change had passed upon Tom in his illness, that Mary saw it not unreasonable to try upon him now and then a poem of her favourite singer. Oc-

casionally, of course, the feeling was altogether beyond him, but even then he would sometimes enter into the literary merit of the utterance.

"I had no idea there were such gems in George Herbert, Mary!" he said once. "I declare some of them are even in their structure finer than many things that have nothing in them to admire except the structure."

"That is not to be wondered at," replied Mary.

"No," said Joseph; "it is not to be wondered at; for it's clear to me the old gentleman plied a good bow. I can see that plain enough."

"Tell us how you see it," said Mary, more interested than she would have liked to show.

"Easily," he answered. "There was one poem"—he pronounced it *pome*—"you read just now,—"

"Which? which?" interrupted Mary eagerly.

"That I cannot tell you; but all the time you were reading it, I heard the gentleman—Mr. George Herbert, you call him—playing the tune to it."

"If you heard him so well," ventured Mary, "you could, I fancy, play the tune over again to us."

"I think I could," he answered, and rising, went for his instrument, which he always brought, and hung on an old nail in the wall the moment he came in.

He played a few bars of a prelude as if to get himself into harmony with the recollection of what he had heard the master play, and then began a lively melody, in which he seemed as usual to pour out his soul. Long before he reached the end of it, Mary had reached the poem.

"This is the one you mean, is it not?" she said, as soon as he had finished—and read it again.

In his turn he did not speak till she had ended.

"That's it, miss," he said then; "I can't mistake it;

for, the minute you began, there was the old gentleman again with his fiddle.

"And you know now what it says, don't you?" asked Mary.

"I heard nothing but the old gentleman," answered the musician.

May turned to Tom.

"Would you mind if I tried to show Mr. Jasper what I see in the poem? He can't get a hold of it himself for the master's violin in his ears; it won't let him think about it."

"I should like myself to hear what you have got to say about it, Mary! Go on," said Tom.

"Mary had now for a long time been a student of George Herbert; and anything of a similar life-experience goes infinitely farther to make one understand another, than any amount of learning or art. Therefore, better than many a poet, Mary was able to set forth the scope and design of this one. Herself at the heart of the secret from which came all his utterance, she could fit herself into most of the convolutions of the shell of his expression, and was hence able also to make others perceive in his verse not a little of what they were of themselves unable to see.

"We shall have you lecturing at the Royal Institution yet, Mary," said Tom; "only it will be long before its members care for that sort of antique."

Tom's insight had always been ahead of his character, and of late he had been growing. People do grow very fast in bed sometimes. Also he had in him plenty of material, to which a childlike desire now began to give shapes and sequences.

The musician's remark consisted in taking his violin, and once more giving his idea of the "old gentleman's"

music, but this time with a richer expression, and fuller harmonies. Mary had every reason to be satisfied with her experiment. From that time she talked a good deal more about her favourite writers, and interested both the critical taste of Tom, and the artistic instinct of the blacksmith.

But Joseph's playing had great faults: how could it be otherwise?—and to Mary great seemed the pity that genius should not be made perfect in faculty, that it should not have that redemption of its body for which unwittingly it groaned. And the man was one of those childlike natures which may indeed go a long time without discovering this or that external fault in themselves, patent to the eye of many an inferior onlooker,—for the simple soul is the last to see its own outside—but once they become aware of it, begin that moment to set the thing right. At the same time he had not enough of knowledge to render it easy to show him by words wherein any fault consisted—the nature, the being of the fault, that is—what it simply was; but Mary felt confident that, the moment he saw a need, he would obey its law.

She had taken for herself the rooms below, formerly occupied by the Helmers, with the hope of seeing them before long reinstated in them; and there she had a piano, the best she could afford to hire: with its aid she hoped to do something towards the breaking of the invisible bonds that tied the wings of Jasper's genius.

His great fault lay in his time. Dare I suggest that he contented himself with measuring it to his inner ear, and let his fingers, like horses which he knew he had safe in hand, play what pranks they pleased? A reader may, I think, be measuring verse correctly to himself, and yet make of it nothing but rugged prose to his

hearers. Perhaps this may be how severe masters of quantity in the abstract, are so careless of it in the concrete—in the audible, namely, where alone it is of value. Shall I analogize yet a little farther, and suggest the many who admire righteousness, and work iniquity; who say, "Lord, Lord," and seldom or never obey? Anyhow, a man may have a good enough ear, with which he holds all the time a secret understanding, and from carelessness offend grievously the ears he ought to please; and it was thus with Joseph Jasper.

Mary was too wise to hurry anything. One evening when he came as usual, and she knew he was not at the moment wanted, she asked him to take a seat while she played something to him. But she was not a little disappointed in the reception he gave her offering—a delicate morsel from Beethoven. She tried something else, but with no better result. He showed little interest: he was not a man capable of showing where nothing was, for he never meant to show anything; his expression was only the ripple of the unconscious pool to the sway and swirl of the fishes below. It seemed as if he had only a narrow entrance for the admission of music into his understanding—but a large outlet for the spring that rose within him, and was therefore a somewhat remarkable exception to the common run of mortals: in such the capacity for reception far exceeds the capability of production. His dominant thoughts were in musical form, and easily found their expression in music; but, mainly no doubt from want of practice in reception, and experience of variety in embodiment, the forms in which others gave themselves utterance could not with corresponding readiness find their way to the sympathetic place in him. But pride or repulsion had no share in

this defect. The man was open and inspired and stupid as a child.

The next time she made the attempt to open this channel between them, something she played did find him, and for a few minutes he seemed lost in listening.

"How nice it would be," she said, "if we could play together sometimes!"

"Do you mean both at once, miss?" he asked.

"Yes—you on your violin, and I on the piano."

"That could hardly be, I'm afraid, miss," he answered; "for, you see, I don't know always—not exactly—what I'm going to play; and if I don't know, and you don't know, how are we to keep together?"

"Nobody can play your own things but yourself, of course—that is, until you are able to write them down; but if you would learn something, we could play that together."

"I don't know how to learn. I've heard tell of the notes and all that, but I don't know how to work them."

"You have heard the choir in the church—all keeping with the organ?" said Mary.

"Scarcely since I was a child—and not very often then—though my mother took me sometimes. But I was always wanting to get out again, and gave no heed."

"Do you never go to church now?"

"No, miss—not for long. Time's too precious to waste."

"How do you spend it then?"

"As soon as I've had my breakfast—that's on a Sunday, I mean—I get up and lock my door, and set myself to have a day of it. Then I read the next thing where I stopped last—whether it be a chapter or a verse—till I get the sense of it—if I can't get that it's no manner of use to me; and I generally know when

I've got it by finding the bow in one hand and the fiddle in the other. Then, with the two together, I go stirring and stirring about at the story, and the music keeps coming and coming; and when it stops, which it does sometimes all at once, then I go back to the book."

"But you don't go on like that all day, do you?" said Mary.

"I generally go on till I'm hungry; and then I go out for something to eat. My landlady won't get me any dinner. Then I come back and begin again."

"Will you let me teach you to read music?" said Mary, more and more delighted with him, and desirous of contributing to his growth—the one great service of the universe.

"If you would, miss, perhaps then I might be able to learn. You see I never was like other people. Mother was the only one that didn't take me for an innocent. She used to talk big things about me, and the rest used to laugh at her. She gave me her large Testament when she was dying, but if it hadn't been for Ann, I should never have been able to read it well enough to understand it. And now Ann tells me I'm a heathen and worship my fiddle, because I don't go to chapel with her; but it do seem such a waste of good time. I'll go to church though, miss, if you tell me it's the right thing to do; only it's hard to work all the week, and be weary all the Sunday. I should only be longing for my fiddle all the time. You don't think, miss, that a great person like God cares whether we pray to him in a room or in a church?"

"No, I don't," answered Mary. "For my own part, I find I can pray best at home."

"So can I," said Joseph, with solemn fervour. "In-

deed, miss, I can't pray at all sometimes till I get my fiddle under my chin, and then it says the prayers for me till I grow able to pray myself. And sometimes when I seem to have got to the outside of prayer, and my soul is hungrier than ever, only I can't tell what I want, all at once I'm at my fiddle again, and it's praying for me. And then sometimes it seems as if I lost myself altogether, and God took me, for I'm nowhere and everywhere all at once."

Mary thought of the "groanings that cannot be uttered." Perhaps that is just what music is meant for—to say the things that have no shape, therefore can have no words, yet are intensely alive—the unembodied children of thought, the eternal child. Certainly the musician can groan the better with the aid of his violin. Surely this man's instrument was the gift of God to him. All God's gifts are a giving of himself. The Spirit can better dwell in a violin than in an ark, or in the mightiest of temples.

But there was another side to the thing, and Mary felt bound to present it.

"But you know, Mr. Jasper," she said, "when many violins play together, each taking a part in relation to all the rest, a much grander music is the result, than any single instrument could produce."

"I've heard tell of such things, miss, but I've never heard them."

He had never been to concert or oratorio, any more than the play.

"Then you shall hear them," said Mary, her heart filling with delight at the thought. "—But what if there should be some way in which the prayers of all souls may blend like many violins? We are all brothers and sisters, you know—and what if the gathering together in church

be one way of making up a concert of souls?—Imagine one mighty prayer made up of all the desires of all the hearts God ever made, breaking like a huge wave against the foot of his throne!”

“There would be some force in a wave like that, miss!” said Joseph. “But answer me one question: ain’t it Christ that teaches men to pray?”

“Surely,” answered Mary. “He taught them with his mouth when he was on the earth; and now he teaches them with his mind.”

“Then, miss, I will tell you why it seems to me that churches can’t be the places to tune the fiddles for that kind of consort—and that’s just why I more than don’t care to go into one of them: I never heard a sermon that didn’t seem to be taking my Christ from me, and burying him where I should never find him any more. For the somebody the clergy talk about, is not only nowise like my Christ, but nowise like a live man at all. It always seemed to me more like a guy they had dressed up, and called by his name, than the man I read about in my mother’s big Testament.”

“How my father would have delighted in this man!” said Mary to herself.

“You see, miss,” Jasper resumed, “I can’t help knowing something about these matters, because I was brought up in it all, my father being a local preacher, and a very god man. Perhaps if I had been as clever as sister Ann, I might be thinking now just as she does; but it seems to me a man that is born stupid has much to be thankful for: he can’t take in things before his heart’s ready for believing them, and so they don’t get spoiled, like a child’s book before he’s able to read it. All that I heard when I went with my father to his preachings was to me no more than one of the chapters full of

names in the Book of Chronicles—though I do remember once hearing a Wesleyan clergyman say that he had got great spiritual benefit from those chapters. I wasn't even frightened at the awful things my father said about hell, and the certainty of our going there if we didn't lay hold upon the Saviour; for, all the time, he showed but such a ghost or cloud of a man that he called the Saviour, as it wasn't possible to lay hold upon. Not that I reasoned about it that way then; I only felt no interest in the affair; and my conscience said nothing about it. But after my father and mother were gone, and I was at work away from all my old friends—well, I needn't trouble you with what it was that set me a thinking,—it was only a great disappointment, such as I suppose most young fellows have to go through:—I shouldn't wonder," he added with a smile, "if that was what you ladies are sent into this world for—to take the conceit out of the likes of us, and give us something to think about. What came of it was, that I began to read my mother's big Testament in earnest, and then my conscience began to speak. Here was a man that said he was God's son, and sent by him to look after us, and we must do what he told us, or we should never be able to see our Father in heaven! That's what I made out of it, miss. And my conscience said to me, that I must do as he said, seeing he had taken all that trouble, and come down to look after us. If he spoke the truth, and nobody could listen to him without being sure of that, there was nothing left but just do the thing he said. So I set about getting a hold of anything he did say, and trying to do it. And then it was that I first began to be able to play on the fiddle, though I had been muddling away at it for a long time before. I knew I could play then, because I understood what it said to me, and got help out of it.

I don't really mean that, you know, miss; for I know well enough that the fiddle in itself is nothing, and nothing is anything but the way God takes to teach us.—And that's how I came to know you, miss."

"How do you mean that?" asked Mary.

"I used to be that frightened of sister Ann, that, after I came to London, I wouldn't have gone near her, but that I thought Jesus Christ would have me go; and if I hadn't gone to see her, I should never have seen you. When I went to see her, I took my fiddle with me to take care of me; and when she would be going on at me, I would just give my fiddle a squeeze under my arm, and that gave me patience."

"But we heard you playing to her, you know."

"That was because I always forgot myself while she was talking. The first time, I remember, it was from misery—what she was saying sounded so wicked, making God out not fit for any honest man to believe in. I began to play without knowing it, and it couldn't have been very loud, for she went on about the devil picking up the good seed sown in the heart. Off I went into that, and there I saw no end of birds with long necks and short legs gobbling up the corn. But a little way off, there was the long beautiful stalks growing strong and high, waving in God's wind; and the birds did not go near them."

Mary drew a long breath, and said to herself,—

"The man is a poet!"—"You're not afraid of your sister now?" she said to him.

"Not a bit," he answered. "Since I knew you, I feel as if we had in a sort of a way changed places, and she was a little girl that must be humoured and made the best of. When she scolds, I laugh, and try to make a bit of fun with her. But she's always so sure she's right,

that you wonder how the world got made before she was up."

They parted with the understanding that when he came next, she should give him his first lesson in reading music. With herself Mary made merry at the idea of teaching the man of genius his letters.

But when once, through trying to play with her one of his own pieces which she had learned from hearing him play it, he had discovered how imperative it was to keep good time, he set himself to the task with a determination that would have made anything of him that he was only half as fit to become as a musician.

When, however, in a short time, he was able to learn from notes, he grew so delighted with some of the music Mary got for him, entering into every nicety of severest law, and finding therein a better liberty than that of improvisation, that he ceased for long to play anything of his own, and Mary became mortally afraid lest, in developing the performer, she had ruined the composer.

"How can I go playing such loose, skinny things," he would say, "when here are such perfect shapes all ready to my hand!"

But Mary said to herself that, if these were shapes, his were odours.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SAPPHIRE.

ONE morning, as Mary sat at her piano, Mewks was shown into the room. He brought the request from his master that she would go to him: he wanted particularly to see her. She did not much like it, neither did she hesitate.

She was shown into the room Mr. Redmain called his study, which communicated by a dressing-room with his bedroom. He was seated, evidently waiting for her.

"Ah, Miss Marston!" he said; "I have a piece of good news for you—so good that I thought I should like to give it you myself."

"You are very kind, sir," Mary answered.

"There!" he went on, holding out what she saw at once was the lost ring.

"I am so glad!" she said, and took it in her hand. "Where was it found?"

"There's the point!" he returned. "That is just why I sent for you! Can you suggest any explanation of the fact, that it was found, after all, in a corner of my wife's jewel-box? Who searched the box last?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Did you search it?"

"No, sir. I offered to help Mrs. Redmain to look for the ring, but she said it was no use. Who found it, sir?"

"I will tell you who found it, if you will tell me who put it there."

"I don't know what you mean, sir. It must have been there all the time."

"That's the point again! Mrs. Redmain swears it was not, and could not have been, there when she looked for it. It is not like a small thing, you see. There is something mysterious about it."

He looked hard at Mary.

Now Mary had very much admired the ring, as any one must who had an eye for stones; and had often looked at it—into the heart of it—almost loving it; and while they were talking now, she kept gazing at it. When Mr. Redmain ended, she stood silent. In her silence, her attention concentrated itself upon the sapphire. She stood long, looking closely at it, moving it about a little, and changing the direction of the light; and while her gaze was on the ring, Mr. Redmain's gaze was on her, watching her with equal attention. At last, with a sigh as if she waked from a reverie, she laid the ring on the table. But Mr. Redmain still stared in her face.

"Now what is it you've got in your head?" he said at last. "I have been watching you think for three minutes and a half, I do believe. Come, out with it!"

"Hardly *think*, sir," answered Mary. "I was only plaguing myself between my recollection of the stone, and the actual look of it. It is so annoying to find what seemed a clear recollection prove a deceitful one! It may appear a presumptuous thing to say, but my recollection seems of a finer colour."

While she spoke, she had again taken the ring, and was looking at it. Mr. Redmain snatched it from her hand.

"The devil!" he cried. "You haven't the face to hint that the stone has been changed?"

Mary laughed.

"Such a thing never came into my head, sir; but now that you have put it there, I could almost believe it."

"Go along with you!" he cried, casting at her a strange look, which she could not understand, and the same moment pulling the bell hard.

That done, he began to examine the ring intently, as Mary had been doing, and did not speak a word. Mewks came.

"Show Miss Marston out," said his master; "and tell my coachman to bring the hansom round directly."

"For Miss Marston?" inquired Mewks, who had learned not a little cunning in the service.

"No!" roared Mr. Redmain; and Mewks darted from the room, followed more leisurely by Mary.

"I don't know what's come to master!" ventured Mewks, as he led the way down the stair.

But Mary took no notice, and left the house.

For about a week she heard nothing.

In the meantime Mr. Redmain had been prosecuting certain inquiries he had some time ago begun, and another quite new one besides. He was acquainted with many people of many different sorts, and had been to jewellers and pawnbrokers, gamblers and lodging-house-keepers, and had learned some things to his purpose.

Once more Mary received from him a summons, and once more, considerably against her liking, obeyed. She was less disinclined to go this time, however, for she felt not a little curious about the ring.

"I want you to come back to the house," he said abruptly, the moment she entered his room.

For such a request Mary was not prepared. Even since the ring was found so long a time had passed that she never expected to hear from the house again. But

Tom was now so much better, and Letty so much like her former self, that, if Mrs. Redmain had asked her, she might perhaps have consented.

"Mr. Redmain," she answered, "you must see that I cannot do so at your desire."

"Oh, rubbish! humbug!" he returned, with annoyance. "Don't fancy I am asking you to go fiddle-faddling about my wife again: I don't see how you *can* do that, after the way she has used you! But I have reasons for wanting to have you within call. Go to Mrs. Perkin. I won't take a refusal."

"I cannot do it, Mr. Redmain," said Mary; "the thing is impossible." And she turned to leave the room.

"Stop, stop!" cried Mr. Redmain, and jumped from his chair to prevent her.

He would not have succeeded had not Mewks met her in the door-way full in the face. She had to draw back to avoid him, and the man, perceiving at once how things were, closed the door the moment he entered, and stood with his back against it.

"He's in the drawing-room, sir," said Mewks.

A scarcely perceptible sign of question was made by the master, and answered in kind by the man.

"Show him here directly," said Mr. Redmain. Then turning to Mary, "Go out that way, Miss Marston, if you will go," he said, and pointed to the dressing-room.

Mary, without a suspicion, obeyed; but, just as she discovered that the door into the bedroom beyond was locked, she heard the door behind her locked also. She turned, and knocked.

"Stay where you are," said Mr. Redmain, in a low, but imperative voice. "I cannot let you out till this gentleman is gone. You must hear what passes: I want you for a witness."

Bewildered and annoyed, Mary stood motionless in the middle of the room, and presently heard a man, whose voice seemed not quite strange to her, greet Mr. Redmain like an old friend. The latter made a slight apology for having sent for him to his study—claiming the privilege, he said, of an invalid, who could not for a time have the pleasure of meeting him either at the club or at his wife's parties. The visitor answered agreeably, with a touch of merriment that seemed to indicate a soul at ease with itself and with the world.

But here Mary all at once came to herself, and was aware that she was in quite a false position. She withdrew therefore to the farthest corner, sat down, closed her ears with the palms of her hands, and waited.

She had sat thus for a long time, not weary, but occupied with such thoughts as could hardly for a century or two cross the horizon line of such a soul as Mr. Redmain's, even if he were at once to repent, when she heard a loud voice calling her name as from a distance. She raised her head, and saw the white, skin-drawn face of Mr. Redmain grinning at her from the open door. When he spoke again, his words sounded like thunder, for she had removed her hands from her ears.

"I fancy you've had a dose of it!" he said.

As he spoke, she rose to her feet, her countenance illumined both with righteous anger and the tender shine of prayer. Her look went to what he had of a heart, and the slightest possible colour rose to his face.

"Gone a step too far, damn it!" he murmured to himself. "There's no knowing one woman by another!"

"I see!" he said; "it's been a trifle too much for you, and I don't wonder! You needn't believe a word I said about myself. It was all hum to make the villain show his game."

"I have not heard a word, Mr. Redmain," she said with indignation.

"Oh, you needn't trouble yourself!" he returned. "I meant you to hear it all. What did I put you there for, but to get your oath to what I drew from the fellow? A fine thing if your pretended squeamishness ruin my plot! What do you think of yourself, hey?—But I don't believe it."

He looked at her keenly, expecting a response, but Mary made him none. For some moments he regarded her curiously, then turned away into the study, saying,—

"Come along. By Jove! I'm ashamed to say it, but I half begin to believe in you. I did think I was past being taken in, but it seems possible for once again.—Of course you will return to Mrs. Redmain now that all is cleared up."

"It is impossible," Mary answered. "I cannot live in a house where the lady mistrusts, and the gentleman insults me."

She left the room, and Mr. Redmain did not try to prevent her. As she left the house she burst into tears; and the fact Mewks carried to his master.

The man was the more careful to report everything about Mary, that there was one in the house of whom he never reported anything, but to whom, on the contrary, he told everything he thought she would care to know. Till Sepia came, he had been conventionally faithful—faithful with the faith of a lackey, that is; but she had found no difficulty in making of him, in respect of her, a spy upon his master.

I will now relate what passed while Mary sat deaf in the corner.

Mr. Redmain asked his visitor what he would have, as if, although it was quite early, he must, as a matter

of course, stand in need of refreshment. He made choice of brandy and soda-water, and the bell was rung. A good deal of conversation followed about a disputed point in a late game of cards at one of the clubs.

The talk then veered in another direction—that of personal adventure, so guided by Mr. Redmain. He told extravagant stories about himself and his doings, in particular various ruses by which he had contrived to lay his hands on money. And whatever he told, his guest capped, narrating trick upon trick to which on different occasions he had had recourse. At all of them Mr. Redmain laughed heartily, and applauded their cleverness extravagantly, though some of them were downright swindling.

At last Mr. Redmain told how he had once got money out of a lady. I do not believe there was a word of truth in it. But it was capped by the other with a narrative that seemed specially pleasing to the listener. In the midst of a burst of laughter, he rose and rang the bell. Count Galofta thought it was to order something more in the way of “refreshment,” and was not a little surprised when he heard his host desire the man to request the favour of Miss Yolland’s presence. But the count had not studied non-expression in vain, and had brought it to a degree of perfection not easily disturbed. Casting a glance at him as he gave the message, Mr. Redmain could read nothing; but this was in itself suspicious to him—and justly, for the man ought to have been surprised at such a close to the conversation they had been having.

Sepia had been told that Galofta was in the study, and therefore received the summons thither—a thing that had never happened before—with the greater alarm. She made, consequently, what preparation she could

against surprise. Thoroughly capable of managing her features, her anxiety was sufficient nevertheless to deprive her of power over her complexion, and she entered the room with the pallor peculiar to the dark-skinned. Having greeted the count with the greatest composure, she turned to Mr. Redmain with question in her eyes.

"Count Galofta," said Mr. Redmain in reply, "has just been telling me a curious story of how a certain rascal got possession of a valuable jewel from a lady with whom he pretended to be in love, and I thought the opportunity a good one for showing you a strange discovery I have made with regard to the sapphire Mrs. Redmain missed for so long. Very odd tricks are played with gems—such gems, that is, as are of value enough to make it worth a rogue's while."

So saying, he took the ring from one drawer, and from another a bottle, from which he poured something into a crystal cup. Then he took a file, and, looking at Galofta, in whose well-drilled features he believed he read something that was not mere curiosity, said, "I am going to show you something very curious," and began to file asunder that part of the ring which immediately clasped the sapphire, the setting of which was open.

"What a pity!" cried Sepia; "you are destroying the ring! What will cousin Hesper say!"

Mr. Redmain filed away heedless; then with the help of a pair of pincers freed the stone, and held it up in his hand.

"You see this?" he said.

"A splendid sapphire!" answered Count Galofta, taking it in his fingers, but, as Mr. Redmain saw, not looking at it closely.

"I have always heard it called a splendid stone," said Sepia, whose complexion, though not her features,

passed through several changes while all this was going on: she was anxious.

Nor did her inquisitor fail to surprise the uneasy glances she threw, furtively though involuntarily, in the face of the count—who never once looked in hers: tolerably sure of himself, he was not sure of her.

“That ring, when I bought it—the stone of it,” said Mr. Redmain, “was a star-sapphire, and worth seven hundred pounds; now, the whole affair is worth about ten.”

As he spoke he threw the stone into the cup, let it lie a few moments, and took it out again; when, almost with a touch, he divided it in two, the one a mere scale.

“There!” he said, holding out the thin part on the tip of a finger, “that is a slice of sapphire; and there!” holding out the rest of the seeming stone, “that is glass.”

“What a shame!” cried Sepia.

“Of course,” said the count, “you will prosecute the jeweller.”

“I will not prosecute the jeweller,” answered Mr. Redmain; “but I have taken some trouble to find out who changed the stones.”

With that he threw both the bits of blue into a drawer, and the contents of the cup into the fire. A great flame flew up the chimney, and as if struck at the sight of it, he stood gazing for a moment after it had vanished.

When he turned, the count was gone, as he had expected, and Sepia stood with eyes full of anger and fear. Her face was set and colourless, and strange to look upon.

“Very odd—ain’t it?” said Mr. Redmain, rose, and opening the door of his dressing-room, called out,—

“Miss Marston!”

When he turned, Sepia too was gone.

I would not have my reader take Sepia for an accomplice in the robbery. Even Mr. Redmain did not believe that: she was much too prudent! His idea was, that she had been wearing the ring—Hesper did not mind what she wore of hers; and that—I need not give his conjecture in detail—with or without her knowledge, the fellow had got hold of it and carried it away, then brought it back, treating the thing as a joke, when she was only too glad to restore it to the jewel-case, hoping the loss of it would then pass for an oversight on the part of Hesper. If he was right in this theory of the affair, then the count had certainly a hold upon her, and she dared not, or would not expose him!

He had before discovered that, about the time when the ring disappeared, the count had had losses, and was supposed unable to meet them, but had suddenly showed himself again “flush of money,” and from that time had had an extraordinary run of luck.

When he went out of the door of Mr. Redmain’s study, he vanished from the house and from London. Turning the first corner he came to, and the next and the next, he stepped into a mews, the court of which seemed empty, and slipped behind the gate. He wore a new hat, and was clean shaved except his upper lip. Presently a man came out of the mews in a Scotch cap, and a full beard.

What had become of him Mr. Redmain did not care. He had no desire to punish him. It was enough he had found him out, proved his suspicion correct, and obtained evidence against Sepia. He did not at once make up his mind how he would act on this last; while he lived it did not matter so much; and he had besides a certain pleasure in watching his victim. But Hesper free, rich

and beautiful, and far from wise, with Sepia for counsellor, was not an idea to be contemplated with equanimity. Still he shrank from the outcry and scandal of sending her away; for certainly his wife, if it were but to oppose him, would refuse to believe a word against her cousin.

For the present, therefore, the thing seemed to blow over. Mr. Redmain, who had pleasure in behaving handsomely so far as money was concerned, bought his wife the best sapphire he could find, and, for once, really pleased her.

But Sepia knew that Mr. Redmain had now to himself justified his dislike of her; and as he said nothing, she was the more certain he meant something. She lived therefore in constant dread of his sudden vengeance, against which she could take no precaution, for she had not even a conjecture as to what form it might assume. From that hour she was never at peace in his presence, and hardly out of it; from every possible *tête-à-tête* with him, she fled as from a judgment.

Nor was it a small addition to her misery that she imagined Mary cognizant of Mr. Redmain's opinion and intention with regard to her, and holding the worst possible opinion of her. For whatever had passed first between the count and Mr. Redmain, she did not doubt Mary had heard, and was prepared to bring against her, when the determined moment should arrive. How much the count might or might not have said, she could not tell; but seeing their common enemy had permitted him to escape, she more than dreaded he had sold her secret for his own impunity, and had laid upon her a burden of lies as well.

CHAPTER XIX.

REPARATION.

WITH all Mr. Redmain's faults, there was a certain love of justice in the man; only, as is the case with most of us, it had ten times the reference to the action of other people that it had to his own: I mean, he made far greater demand for justice upon other people than upon himself; and was much more indignant at any shortcoming of theirs which crossed any desire or purpose of his, than he was anxious in his own person to fulfil justice, when that fulfilment in its turn would cross any wish he cherished. Badly as he had himself behaved to Mary, he was now furious with his wife for having treated her so heartlessly that she could not return to her service; for he began to think she might be one to depend upon, and to desire her alliance in the matter of ousting Sepia from the confidence of his wife.

However indifferent a woman may be to the opinion of her husband, he can nevertheless in general manage to make her uncomfortable enough if he chooses; and Mr. Redmain did choose now, in the event of her opposition to his wishes: when he set himself to do a thing, he hated defeat even more than he loved success.

The moment Mary was out of the study, he walked into his wife's boudoir, and shut the door behind him. His presence there was enough to make her angry, but she took no notice of it.

"I understand, Mrs. Redmain," he began, "that you wish to bring the fate of Sodom upon the house."

"I do not know what you mean," she answered,

scarcely raising her eyes from her novel—and spoke the truth, for she knew next to nothing of the Bible, while the old Testament was all the literature Mr. Redmain was “up in.”

“You have turned out of it the only just person in it, and we shall all be in hell soon.”

“How dare you come to my room with such horrid language!”

“You’ll hear worse before long, if you keep on at this rate. My language is not so bad as your actions. If you don’t have that girl back, and in double quick time too, I shall know how to make you.”

“You have taught me to believe you capable of anything.”

“You shall at least find me capable of a good deal. Do you imagine, madam, I have found you a hair worse than I expected?”

“I never took the trouble to imagine anything about you.”

“Then I need not ask you whether I married you to please you, or to please myself?”

“You need not. You can best answer that question yourself.”

“Then we understand each other.”

“We do not, Mr. Redmain; and if this occurs again, I shall go to Durnmelling.”

She spoke with a vague idea that he also stood in some awe of the father and mother, whose dread, however well she hid it, she would never while they lived succeed in shaking off. But to the husband it was a rare delight to speak with conscious rectitude in the moral chastisement of his wife. He burst into a loud and almost merry laugh.

“Happy they will be to see you there, madam! Why,

you goose, if I send a telegram before you, they won't so much as open the door to you! They know better which side their bread is buttered."

Hesper started up in a rage. This was too much—and the more too much, that she believed it would be as he said.

"Mr. Redmain, if you do not leave the room, I will."

"Oh, don't!" he cried, in a tone of pretended alarm. His pleasure was great, for he had succeeded in stinging the impenetrable. "You really ought to consider before you utter such an awful threat! I will go myself a thousand times rather!—But will you not feel the want of pocket-money when you come to pay a rough cabman? The check I gave you yesterday will not last you long."

"The money is my own, Mr. Redmain."

"But you have not yet opened a banking-account in your own name."

"I suppose you have a meaning, Mr. Redmain; but I am not in the habit of using cabs."

"Then you had better get into the habit; for I swear to you, madam, if you don't fetch that girl home within the week, I will, next Monday, discharge your coachman, and send every horse in the stable to Tattersall's. Good morning."

She had no doubt he would do as he said; she knew Mr. Redmain would just enjoy selling her horses. But she could not at once give in. I say "*could* not," because hers was the weak will that can hardly bring itself to do what it knows it must, and is continually mistaken for the strong will that defies and endures. She had a week to think about it, and she would see!

During the interval, he took care not once to refer to his threat, for that would but weaken the impression of it, he knew.

On the Sunday, after service, she knocked at his door, and being admitted, bade him good-morning, but with no very gracious air—as indeed he would have been the last to expect.

“We have had a sermon on the forgiveness of injuries, Mr. Redmain,” she said.

“By Jove!” interrupted her husband, “it would have been more to the purpose if I, or poor Mary Marston, had had it; for I swear you put our souls in peril!”

“The ring was no common one, Mr. Redmain; and the young woman had, by leaving the house, placed herself in a false position: every one suspected her as much as I did. Besides, she lost her temper, and talked about forgiving *me*, when I was in despair about my ring!”

“And what, pray, was your foolish ring compared to the girl’s character?”

“A foolish ring, indeed!—Yes, it was foolish to let you ever have the right to give it me! But as to her character, that of persons in her position is in constant peril. They have to lay their account with that, and must get used to it. How was I to know? We cannot read each other’s hearts.”

“Not where there is no heart in the reader.”

Hesper’s face flushed, but she did her best not to lose her temper. Not that it would have been any great loss if she had, for there is as much difference in the values of tempers as in those who lose them. She said nothing, and her husband resumed.

“So you came to forgive me?” he said.

“And Marston,” she answered.

“Well, I will accept the condescension—that is, if the terms of it are to my mind.”

“I will make no terms. Marston may return when she pleases.”

"You must write and ask her."

"Of course, Mr. Redmain. It would hardly be suitable that *you* should ask her."

"You must write so as to make it possible to accept your offer."

"I am not deceitful, Mr. Redmain."

"You are not. A man must be fair, even to his wife."

"I will show you the letter I write."

"If you please."

She had to show him half a score ere he was satisfied, declaring he would do it himself, if she could not make a better job of it.

At length one was despatched, received, and answered: Mary would not return. She had lost all hope of being of any true service to Mrs. Redmain, and she knew that, with Tom and Letty, she was really of use for the present.

Mrs. Redmain carried the letter, with ill-concealed triumph, to her husband; nor did he conceal his annoyance.

"You must have behaved to her very cruelly," he said. "But you have done your best now—short of a Christian apology, which it would be folly to demand of you. I fear we have seen the last of her."—"And there was I," he said to himself, "for the first time in my life, actually beginning to fancy I had perhaps thrown salt upon the tail of that rare bird, an honest woman! The devil has had quite as much to do with my history as with my character! Perhaps that will be taken into the account one day."

But Mary lay awake at night, and thought of many things she might have said and done better when she was with Hesper, and would gladly have given herself another chance; but she could no longer flatter herself

she would ever be of any real good to her. She believed there was more hope of Mr. Redmain even. For had she not once, for one brief moment, seen him look a trifle ashamed of himself? while Hesper was and remained, so far as she could judge, altogether satisfied with herself. Equal to her own demands upon herself, there was nothing in her to begin with—no soil to work upon.

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER CHANGE.

FOR some time Tom made progress towards health, and was able to read a good part of the day. Most evenings he asked Joseph to play to him for a while; he was fond of music, and fonder still of criticism—upon anything. When he had done with Joseph, or when he did not want him, Mary was always ready to give the latter a lesson; and had he been a less gifted man than he was, he could not have failed to make progress with such a teacher.

The large-hearted, delicate-souled woman felt nothing strange in the presence of the working man, but on the contrary was comfortably aware of a being like her own, less privileged but more gifted, whose nearness was strength. And no teacher, not to say no woman, could have failed to be pleased at the thorough painstaking with which he followed the slightest of her hints, and the delight his flushed face would reveal, when she praised the success he had achieved.

It was not long before he began to write some of the things that came into his mind. For the period of quiescence as to production, which followed the initiation

of more orderly study, was after all but of short duration, and the return tide of musical utterance was stronger than ever. Mary's delight was great when first he brought her one of his compositions very fairly written out—after which others followed with a rapidity that astonished her. They enabled her also to understand the man better and better; for to have a thing to brood over which we are capable of understanding, must be more to us than even the master's playing of it. She could not be sure this or that was correct according to the sweet inexorability of musical ordainment, but the more she pondered them, the more she felt that the man was original, that the material was there, and the law at hand, that he brought his music from the only bottomless well of utterance, the truth, namely, by which alone the soul most glorious in gladness, or any other the stupidest of souls, can live.

To the first he brought her, she contrived to put a poor little faulty accompaniment; and when she played his air to him so accompanied, his delight was touching, and not a little amusing. Plainly he thought the accompaniment a triumph of human faculty, and beyond anything he could ever develope. Never pupil was more humble, never pupil more obedient; thinking nothing of himself or of anything he had done or could do, his path was open to the swiftest and highest growth. It matters little where a man may be at this moment; the point is whether he is growing. The next point will be, whether he is growing at the ratio given him. The key to the whole thing is *obedience*, and nothing else.

What the gift of such an instructor was to Joseph, my reader may be requested to imagine. He was like a man seated on the grass outside the heavenly gate, from which, slow-opening every evening as the sun went down, came an angel to teach, and teach, until he too should

be fit to enter in: an hour would arrive when she would no longer have to come out to him where he sat. Under such an influence, all that was gentlest and sweetest in his nature might well develope with rapidity, and every accidental roughness, and in him there was no other, by swift degrees vanish from both speech and manners. The angels do not want tailors to make their clothes: their habits come out of themselves. But we are often too hard upon our fellows; for many of those in the higher ranks of life—no, no, I mean of society—whose insolence wakens ours, as growl wakes growl in the forest, are not yet so far removed from the savage—I mean in their personal history—as some in the lowest ranks. When a nobleman mistakes the love of right in another for a hatred of refinement, he cannot be far from mistaking insolence for good manners. Of such a nobility, good Lord, deliver us from all envy!

As to falling in love with a lady like Mary, such a thing was as far from Jasper's consciousness, as if she had been a duchess. She belonged to another world from his, a world which his world worshipped, waiting. He might miss her even to death; her absence might for him darken the universe as if the sun had withdrawn his brightness; but who thinks of falling in love with the sun, or dreams of climbing nearer to his radiance?

The day will one day come—or what of the long-promised kingdom of heaven?—when a woman, instead of spending anxious thought on the adornment of her own outward person, will seek with might the adornment of the inward soul of another, and will make that her crown of rejoicing. Nay, are there none such even now? The day will come when a man, rather than build a great house for the overflow of a mighty hospitality, will give himself, in the personal labour of outgoing love, to build

spiritual houses like St. Paul—a higher art than any of man's invention. O my brother, what were it not for thee, to have a hand in making thy brother beautiful!

Be not indignant, my reader: not for a moment did I imagine thee capable of such a mean calling! It is left to a certain school of weak enthusiasts, who believe that such growth, such embellishment, such creation, is all God cares about; these enthusiasts cannot indeed see, so blind have they become with their fixed idea, how God could care for anything else. They actually believe that the very son of the life-making God lived and died for that, and for nothing else. That such men and women are fools, is and has been so widely believed, that to men of the stamp of my indignant reader, it has become a fact! But the end alone will reveal the beginning. Such a fool was Prometheus with the vulture at his heart—but greater than Jupiter with his gods around him.

There soon came a change, however, and the lessons ceased altogether.

Tom had come down to his old quarters, and in the arrogance of convalescence, had presumed on his imagined strength, and so caught cold. An alarming relapse was the consequence, and there was no more playing; for now his condition began to draw to a change of which, for some time, none of them had even thought, the patient had seemed so certainly recovering. The cold settled on his lungs, and he sank rapidly.

Joseph, whose violin was useless now, was not the less in attendance. Every evening when his work was over, he came knocking gently at the door of the parlour, and never left until Tom was settled for the night. The most silently helpful, undemonstrative being he was, that doctor could desire to wait upon patient. When it was his turn to watch, he never closed an eye, but at daybreak, for it

was now spring, would rouse Mary, and go off straight to his work, nor taste food until the hour for the mid-day meal arrived.

Tom speedily became aware that his days were numbered—phrase of unbelief, for are they not numbered from the beginning? Are our hairs numbered, and our days forgotten—till death gives a hint to the doctor? He was sorry for his past life, and thoroughly ashamed of much of it, saying in all honesty he would rather die than fall for one solitary week into the old ways—not that he wished to die, for, with the confidence of youth, he did not believe he could fall into the old ways again. For my part, I think he was taken away to have a little more of that care and nursing, which neither his mother nor his wife had been woman enough to give the great baby. After all, he had not been one of the worst of babies.

Is it strange that one so used to bad company and bad ways should have so altered, in so short a time, and without any great struggle? The assurance of death at the door, and a wholesome shame of things that are past, may, I think, lead up to such a swift change, even in a much worse man than Tom. For there is the Life itself, all-surrounding, and ever pressing in upon the human soul, wherever that soul will afford a chink of entrance; and Tom had not yet sealed up all his doors.

When he lay there dead—for what excuse could we have for foolish lamentation, if we did not speak of the loved as *lying dead*?—Letty had him already enshrined in her heart as the best of husbands—as her own Tom, who had never said a hard word to her—as the cleverest as well as kindest of men, who had written poetry that would never die while the English language was spoken. Nor did the Firefly spare its dole of homage to the memory of one of its gayest writers. Indeed, all about its office

had loved him, each after his faculty. Even the boy cried when he heard he was gone, for to him too he had always given a kind word, coming and going. A certain little runnel of verse flowed no more through the pages of the Firefly, and in a month there was not the shadow of Tom upon his age. But the print of him was deep in the heart of Letty, and not shallow in the affection of Mary; nor were such as these, insignificant records for any one to leave behind him, as records go. Happy was he to have left behind him any love, especially such a love as Letty bore him! For what is the loudest praise of posterity to the quietest love of one's own generation? For his mother, her memory was mostly in her temper. She had never understood her wayward child, just because she had given him her waywardness, and not parted with it herself, so that between them the two made havoc of love. But she who gives her child all he desires, in the hope of thus binding his love to herself, no less than she who thwarts him in everything, may rest assured of the neglect she has richly earned. When she heard of his death, she howled and cursed her fate, and the woman, meaning poor Letty, who had parted her and her Tom, swearing she would never set eyes upon her, never let her touch a farthing of Tom's money. She would not hear of paying his debts until Mary told her she then would, upon which the fear of public disapprobation wrought for right if not righteousness.

But what was Mary to do now with Letty? She was little more than a baby yet, not silly from youth, but young from silliness. Children must learn to walk, but not by being turned out alone in Cheapside.

She was relieved from some perplexity for the present, however, by the arrival of a letter from Mrs. Wardour to Letty, written in a tone of stiffly condescending com-

passion—not so unpleasant to Letty as to her friend, because from childhood she had been used to the nature that produced it, and had her mind full of a vast, undefined notion of the superiority of the writer. It may be a question whether those who fill our inexperienced minds with false notions of their greatness, do us thereby more harm or good; certainly when one comes to understand with what an arrogance and self-assertion they have done so, putting into us as reverence, that which in them is conceit, one is ready to be scornful more than enough; but rather than have a child question such claims, I would have him respect the meanest soul that ever demanded respect: the first shall be last in good time, and the power of revering come forth uninjured; whereas a child judging his elders has already withered the blossom of his being.

But Mrs. Wardour's letter was kind—perhaps a little repentant; it is hard to say, for ten persons will repent of a sin, for one who will confess it—I do not mean to the priest—that may be an easy matter, but to the only one who has a claim to the confession, namely, the person wronged. Yet such confession is in truth far more needful to the wronger than to the wronged; it is a small thing to be wronged, but a horrible thing to wrong.

The letter contained a poverty-stricken expression of sympathy, and an invitation to spend the summer months with them at her old home. It might, the letter said, prove but a dull place to her after the gaiety to which she had of late been accustomed, but it might not the less suit her present sad situation, and possibly uncertain prospects.

Letty's heart felt one little throb of gladness at the thought of being again at Thornwick, and in peace.

With all the probable unpleasant accompaniments of the visit, nowhere else, she thought, could she feel the same sense of shelter as where her childhood had passed. Mary also was pleased; for although Letty might not be comfortable, the visit would end, and by that time she might know what could be devised best for her comfort and well-being.

CHAPTER XXI.

DISSOLUTION.

It was now Mary's turn to feel that she was, for the first time in her life, about to be cut adrift—adrift, that is, as a world is adrift, on the surest of paths, though without eyes to see. For ten days or so, she could form no idea of what she was likely or would like to do next. But when we are in such perplexity, may not the fact be accepted as showing that decision is not required of us—perhaps just because our way is at the moment being made straight for us?

Joseph called once or twice, but for Letty's sake they had no music. As they met so seldom now, Mary, anxious to serve him as she could, offered him the loan of some of her favourite books. He accepted it with a gladness that surprised her, for she did not know how much he had of late been reading.

One day she received an unexpected visit—from Mr. Brett, her lawyer. He had been searching into the affairs of the shop, and had discovered enough to make him uneasy, and indeed fill him with self-reproach that he had not done so with more thoroughness immediately on her father's death. He had come to tell her all he

knew, and talk the matter over with her, that they might agree what proceedings should be taken.

I will not weary myself or my readers with business detail, for which kind of thing I have no great aptitude, and a good deal of incapacitating ignorance; but content myself with the briefest statement of the condition in which Mr. Brett found the affairs of Mr. Turnbull.

He had been speculating in several companies, making haste to be rich, and had perilled and lost what he had saved of the profits of the business, and all of Mary's as well that had not been elsewhere secured. He had even trenched on the original capital of the firm, by postponing the payment of moneys due, and allowing the stock to run down and to deteriorate, and things out of fashion to accumulate, so that the business had perceptibly fallen off. But what displeased Mary more than anything was, that he had used money of her father's to speculate with in more than one public-house; and she knew that if in her father's lifetime he had so used even his own, it would have been enough to make him insist on dissolving partnership.

It was impossible to allow her money to remain any longer in the power of such a man, and she gave authority to Mr. Brett to make the necessary arrangements for putting an end to business relations between them.

It was a somewhat complicated, therefore tedious business; and things looked worse the farther they were searched into. Unable to varnish the facts to the experience of a professional eye, Mr. Turnbull wrote Mary a letter almost cringing in its tone, begging her to remember the years her father and he had been as brothers; how she had grown up in the shop, and had been to him, until misunderstandings arose, into the

causes of which he could not now enter, in the place of a daughter; and insisting that her withdrawal from it had had no small share in the ruin of the business. For these considerations, and, more than all, for the memory of her father, he entreated her to leave things as they were, to trust him to see after the interests of the daughter of his old friend, and not insist upon measures which must end in a forced sale, in the shutting up of the shop of Turnbull and Marston, and the disgracing of her father's name along with his.

Mary replied that she was acting by the advice of her father's lawyer, and with the regard she owed her father's memory, in severing all connexion with a man in whom she no longer had confidence; and insisted that the business must be wound up as soon as possible.

She instructed Mr. Brett, at the same time, that, if it could be managed, she would prefer getting the shop, even at considerable loss, into her own hands, with what stock might be in it, when she would attempt to conduct the business on principles her father would have approved, whereby she did not doubt of soon restoring it to repute. While she had no intention, she said, of selling so *well* as Mr. Turnbull would fain have done, she believed she would soon be able to buy to just as good advantage as he. It would be necessary, however, to keep her desire a secret, else Mr. Turnbull would be certain to frustrate it.

Mr. Brett approved of her plan, for he knew she was much respected, and had many friends. Mr. Turnbull would be glad, he said, to give up the whole to escape prosecution—that at least was how Mary interpreted his somewhat technical statement of affairs between them.

The swindler wrote again, begging for an interview—which she declined, except in the presence of her lawyer.

She made up her mind that she would not go near Testbridge till everything was settled, and the keys of the shop in Mr. Brett's hands; and remained therefore where she was—with Letty, who to keep her company delayed her departure as long as she could without giving offence at Thornwick.

A few days before Letty was at last compelled to leave, Jasper called, and heard about as much as they knew themselves of their plans. When Mary said to him she would miss her pupil, he smiled in a sort of abstracted way, as if not quite apprehending what she said, which seemed to Mary a little odd, his manners in essentials being those of a gentleman, as judged by one a little more than a lady; for there is an unnamed degree higher than the ordinary *lady*.

So Mary was left alone—more alone than she had ever been in her life. But she did not feel lonely, for the best of reasons—that she never fancied herself alone, but knew that she was not. Also she had books at her command, being one of the few who can read; and there were picture-galleries to go to, and music-lessons to be had. Of these last she crowded in as many as her master could be persuaded to give her—for it would be long, she knew, before she was able to have such again.

Joseph Jasper never came near her. She could not imagine why, and was disappointed and puzzled.

To know that Ann Byrom was in the house was not a great comfort to her—she regarded so much that Mary loved as of earth and not of heaven. God's world even she despised, because men called it nature, and spoke of its influences. But Mary did go up to see her now and then. Very different she seemed from the time when first they were at work together over Hesper's twilight dress! Ever since Mary had made the acquaintance of

her brother, she seemed to have changed towards her. Perhaps she was jealous; perhaps she believed Mary was confirming him in his bad ways. Just where they were all three of one mind—just *there* her rudimentary, therefore self-sufficient religion, shut them out from her sympathy and fellowship.

Alone, and with her time at her command, Mary was more inclined than she had ever been, except for her father's company, to go to church. The second Sunday after Letty left her, she went to the one nearest, and in the congregation thought she saw Joseph. A week before, she would have waited for him as he came out, but now that he seemed to avoid her, she would not, and went home neither comforted by the sermon, nor comfortable with herself. For the parson, instead of recognizing, through all defects of the actual, the pattern after which God had made man, would fain have him remade after the pattern of the middle-age monk—a being far superior, no doubt, to the most of his contemporaries, but as far from the beauty of the perfect man, as the mule is from that of the horse; and she was annoyed with herself that she was annoyed with Joseph.

It was the middle of summer before the affairs of the firm were wound up, and the shop in the hands of the London man whom Mr. Brett had employed in the purchase.

Lawyer as he was, however, Mr. Brett had not been sharp enough for Turnbull. The very next day, a shop in the same street, that had been to let for some time, displayed above its now open door the sign, *John Turnbull, late*—then a very small *of—Turnbull and Marston*; whereupon Mr. Brett saw the oversight of which he had been guilty. There was nothing in the shop when it was opened, but that Turnbull utilized for advertisement: he

had so arranged, that within an hour the goods began to arrive, and kept arriving, by every train, for days and days after, while all the time he made public show of himself, fussing about, the most triumphant man in the town. It made people talk, and if not always as he would have liked to hear them talk, yet it was talk, and, in the matter of advertisement, that is the main thing.

When it was told Mary, it gave her not the smallest uneasiness. She only saw what had several times seemed on the point of arriving in her father's lifetime. She would not have moved a finger to prevent it. Let the two principles meet, with what result God pleased!

Whether he had suspected her design, and had determined to challenge her before the public, I cannot tell; but his wife's aversion to shop-keeping was so great, that one who knew what sort of scene passed because of it between them, would have expected that, but for some very strong reason, he would have been glad enough to retire from that mode of gaining a livelihood. As it was, things appeared to go on with them just as before. They still inhabited the villa, the wife scornful of her surroundings, and the husband driving a good horse to his shop every morning. How he managed it all, nobody knew but himself, and whether he succeeded or not was a matter of small interest to any except his own family and his creditors. He was a man nowise beloved, although there was something about him that carried simple people with him—for his ends, not theirs. To those who alluded to the change, he represented it as entirely his own doing, to be rid of the interference of Miss Marston in matters of which she knew nothing. He knew well that a confident lie has all the look of truth, and while fact and falsehood were disputing together in men's mouths, he would be selling his drapery. The country-people

were flattered by the confidence he seemed to put in them by this explanation, and those who liked him before sought the new shop as they had frequented the old one.

Unlike most men, not to say lawyers, Mr. Brett was fully recognizant to Mary of his oversight, and was not a little relieved to be assured she would not have had the thing otherwise: she would gladly meet Mr. Turnbull in a fair field—not that she would in the least acknowledge or think of him as a rival; she would simply carry out her own ideas of right, without regard to him or any measures he might take; the result should be as God willed. Mr. Brett shook his head: he knew her father of old, and saw the daughter prepared to go beyond the father. Theirs were principles that did not come within the range of his practice! He said to himself and his wife, that the world could not go on for a twelvemonth if such ways were to become universal: whether by the world he meant his own profession, I will not inquire. Certainly he did not make the reflection, that the new ways are intended to throw out the old ways; and the worst argument against any way is that the world cannot go on so; for that is just what is wanted—that the world should not go on so. Mr. Brett nevertheless admired not only Mary's pluck, but the business-faculty which every moment she manifested: there *is* a holy way of doing business, and little as business-men may think it, that is the standard by which they must be tried; for their judge in business affairs is not their own trade or profession, but the man who came to convince the world concerning right and wrong and the choice between them; or, in the older speech—to reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

CHAPTER XXII.

THORNWICK.

It was almost with bewilderment that Mrs. Helmer revisited Thornwick. The near past seemed to have vanished like a dream that leaves a sorrow behind it, and the far past to take its place. She had never been accustomed to reflect on her own feelings; things came, were welcome or unwelcome, proved better or worse than she had anticipated, passed away, and were mostly forgotten. With plenty of faculty, Letty had not yet emerged from the chrysalid condition; she lived much as one in a dream, with whose dream mingle sounds and glimmers from the waking world. Very few of us are awake, very few even alive in true, availing sense. "Pooh! what stuff!" says the sleeper, and will say it until the waking begins to come.

On the threshold of her old home then, Letty found her old self awaiting her; she crossed it, and was once more just Letty, a Letty wrapt in the garments of sorrow, and with a heaviness at the heart, but far from such a miserable Letty as during the last of her former life there. Little joy had been hers since the terrible night when she fled from its closed doors; and now that she returned, she could take up everything where she had left it, except the gladness. But peace is better than gladness, and she was on the way to find that.

Mrs. Wardour, who, for all her severity, was not without a good-sized heart, and whose conscience had spoken to her in regard of Letty far oftener than any torture would have made her allow, was touched with com-

passion at sight of her worn and sad look; and, granting to herself that the poor thing had been punished enough, even for her want of respect to the house of Thornwick, broke down a little, though with well preserved dignity, and took the wandering ewe-lamb to her bosom. Letty, loving and forgiving always, nestled in it for a moment, and in her own room quietly wept a long time. When she came out, Mrs. Wardour pleased herself with the fancy that her eyes were red with the tears of repentance; but Letty never dreamed of repenting, for that would have been to deny Tom, to cut off her married life, throw it from her, and never more see Tom.

By degrees, rapid yet easy, she slid into all her old ways; took again the charge of the dairy as if she had never left it; attended to the linen; darned the stockings; and in everything but her pale, thin face, and heavy exhausted heart, was the young Letty again. She even went to the harness-room, to look to cousin Godfrey's stirrups and bits; but finding, morning after morning for a whole week, that they had not once been neglected, dismissed the care—not without satisfaction.

Mrs. Wardour continued kind to her; but every now and then would allow a tone as of remembered naughtiness to be sub-audible in speech or request. Letty, even in her own heart, never resented it. She had been so used to it in the old days, that it seemed only natural. And then her aunt considered her health in the kindest way. Now that Letty had known some of the troubles of marriage, she felt more sympathy with her, did not look down upon her from quite such a height, and to Letty this was strangely delightful. Oh, what a dry, hard, cold world this would grow to, but for the blessing of its many sicknesses!

When Godfrey saw her moving about the house as in former days, but changed, like one of the ghosts of his saddest dreams, a new love began to rise out of the buried seed of the old. In vain he reasoned with himself, in vain he resisted. The image of Letty, with its trusting eyes fixed on him so "solemn sad," and its watching looks full of ministration, haunted him, and was too much for him. She was never the sort of woman he could have fancied himself falling in love with; he did in fact say to himself that she was only *almost* a lady—but at the word his heart rebuked him for a traitor to love and its holy laws. Neither in person was she at all his ideal. A woman like Hesper, uplifted and strong, broad-fronted and fearless, large-limbed, and full of latent life, was more of the ideal he could have written poetry about. But we are deeper than we know. Who is capable of knowing his own ideal? The ideal of a man's self is hid in the bosom of God, and may lie ages away from his knowledge; and his ideal of woman is the ideal belonging to this unknown self: the ideal only can bring forth an ideal. He cannot, therefore, know his own ideal of woman; it is, nevertheless—so I presume—this his own unknown ideal that makes a man choose against his choice. Gladly would Godfrey now have taken Letty to his arms. It was no longer anything that from boyhood he had vowed rather to die unmarried, and let the land go to a stranger, than marry a widow. He had to recall every restraining fact of his and her position to prevent him from now precipitating that which he had before too long delayed. But the gulf of the grave, and the jealousy of a mother were between them; for, if he were again to rouse her suspicions, she would certainly get rid of Letty, as she had before intended, so depriving her of a home, and him of opportunity. He kept, therefore,

out of Letty's way as much as he could, went more about the farm, and took long rides.

Nothing was farther from Letty than any merest suspicion of the sort of regard Godfrey cherished for her. There was in her nothing of the self-sentimental. Her poet was gone from her, but she did not therefore take to poetry; nay, what poetry she had learned to like was no longer anything to her now her singing bird had flown to the land of song. To her, Tom was the greatest, the one poet of the age; he had been hers—was hers still, for did he not die telling her that he would go on watching till she came to him? He had loved her, she knew; he had learned to love her better before he died. She must be patient; the day would come when she should be a Psyche, as he had told her, and soar aloft in search of her mate. The sense of wifedom had grown one with her consciousness. It mingled with all her prayers, both in chamber and in church. As she went about the house, she was dreaming of her Tom—an angel in heaven, she said to herself, but none the less her husband, and waiting for her. If she did not read poetry, she read her New Testament; and if she understood it only in a childish fashion, she obeyed it in a childlike one, whence the way of all wisdom lay open before her. It is not where one is, but in what direction he is going. Before her too was her little boy—borne in his father's arms, she pictured him, and hearing from him of the mother who was coming to them by and by, when God had made her good enough to rejoin them!

But while she continued thus simple, Godfrey could not fail to see how much more of a woman she had grown: he was not yet capable of seeing that she would—could never have got so far with him, even if he had married her.

Love and marriage are of the Father's most powerful means for the making of his foolish little ones into sons and daughters. But so unlike in many cases are the immediate consequences to those desired and expected, that it is hard for not a few to believe that he is anywhere looking after their fate—caring about them at all. And the doubt would be a reasonable one, if the end of things was marriage. But the end is life—that we become the children of God; after which all things can and will go their grand natural course; the heart of the Father will be content for his children, and the hearts of the children will be content in their Father.

Godfrey indulged one great and serious mistake in reference to Letty, namely, that, having learned the character of Tom through the saddest of personal experience, she must have come to think of him as he did, and must have dismissed from her heart every remnant of love for him. Of course he would not hint at such a thing, he said to himself, nor would she for a moment allow it, but nothing else could be the state of her mind! He did not know that in a woman's love there is more of the specially divine element than in a man's—namely, the original, the unmediated. The first of God's love is not founded upon any merit, rests only on being and need, and the worth that is yet unborn.

The Redmains were again at Durnmelling—had been for some weeks, and Sepia had taken care that she and Godfrey should meet—on the footpath to Testbridge, in the field accessible by the breach in the haha—here and there and anywhere suitable for a little detention and talk that should seem accidental, and be out of sight. Nor was Godfrey the man to be insensible to the influence of such a woman, brought to bear at close quarters. A man less vulnerable—I hate the word, but it is

the right one with Sepia concerned, for she was in truth an enemy—might perhaps have yielded room to the suspicion that these meetings were not all so accidental as they appeared, and as Sepia treated them; but no glimmer of such a thought passed through the mind of Godfrey. He knew nothing of all that my readers know to Sepia's disadvantage, and her eyes were enough to subdue most men from the first—for a time at least. Had it not been for the return of Letty, she would by this time have had him her slave: nothing but slavery could it ever be to love a woman like her, who gave no love in return, only exercised power. But although he was always glad to meet her, and his heart had begun to beat a little faster at sight of her approach, the glamour of her presence was nearly destroyed by the arrival of Letty; and Sepia was more than sharp enough to perceive a difference in the expression of his eyes the next time she met him. At the very first glance she suspected some hostile influence at work!—intentionally hostile, for persons with a consciousness like Sepia's, are always imagining enemies. And as the two worst enemies she could have were the truth and a woman, she was alternately jealous and terrified: the truth and a woman together, she had not yet begun to fear; that would indeed be too much!

She soon found there was a young woman at Thornwick, who had but just arrived; and ere long she learned who she was—one indeed who had already a shadowy existence in her life:—was it possible the shadow should be now taking solidity, and threatening to foil her? Not once did it occur to her that, were it so, there would be retribution in it. She had heard of Tom's death through the Fire-fly, which had a kind, extravagant article about him, but she had not once thought of his widow—and

there she was, a hedge across the path she wanted to go! If the house of Durnmelling had but been one story higher, that she might see all round Thornwick!

For some time now, as I have already more than hinted, Sepia had been fashioning a man to her thrall,—Mewks, namely, the body-servant of Mr. Redmain. It was a very gradual process she had adopted, and it had been the more successful. It had got so far with him that whatever Sepia showed the least wish to understand, Mewks would take endless trouble to learn for her. The rest of the servants, both at Durnmelling and in London, were none of them very friendly with her—least of all Jemima, who was now with her mistress as lady's-maid, the accomplished attendant whom Hesper had procured in place of Mary being away for a holiday.

The more Sepia realized, or thought she realized, the position she was in, the more desirous was she to get out of it, and the only feasible and safe way, in her eyes, was marriage: there was nothing between that and a return to what she counted slavery. Rather than lift again such a hideous load of irksomeness, she would find her way out of a world in which it was not possible, she said, to be both good and comfortable: she had in truth tried only the latter. But if she could, she thought, secure for a husband this gentleman-yeoman, she might hold up her head with the best. Even if Galofta should reappear, she would know then how to meet him: with a friend or two, such as she had never had yet, she could do what she pleased! It was hard work to get on quite alone—or with people who cared only for themselves! She must have some love on her side! some one who cared for *her*!

From all she could learn, there was nothing that amounted even to ordinary friendship between Mr.

Wardour and the young widow. She was in the family but as a distant poor relation:—"Much as I am myself!" thought Sepia, with a bitter laugh that even in her own eyes she should be comparable to a poor creature like Letty. The fact, however, remained that Godfrey was a little altered towards her: she must have been telling him something against her—something she had heard from that detestable little hypocrite who was turned away on suspicion of theft! Yes—that was how Sepia talked *to herself* about Mary!

One morning, Letty, finding she had an hour's leisure, for her aunt did not pursue her as of old time, wandered out to the oak on the edge of the haha, so memorable with the shadowy presence of her Tom. She had not been seated under it many minutes before Godfrey caught sight of her from his horse's back: knowing his mother was gone to Testbridge, he yielded to an urgent longing, took his horse to the stable, and crossed the grass to where she sat.

Letty was thinking of Tom—what else was there of her own to do?—thinking like a child, looking up into the cloud-flecked sky, and thinking Tom was somewhere there, though she could not see him: she must be good and patient, that she might go up to him, as he could not come down to her!—if he could he would have come long ago! All the enchantment of the first days of her love had come back upon the young widow; all the ill that had crept in between had failed from out her memory, as the false notes in music melt in the air that carries the true ones across ravine and river, meadow and grove, to the listening ear. Letty lived in a dream of her husband—in heaven, "yet not from her"—such a dream of bliss and hope as in itself went far to make up for all her sorrows.

She was sitting with her back towards the tree, and her face to Thornwick, and yet she did not see Godfrey till he was within a few yards of her. She smiled, expecting his kind greeting, but was startled to hear from behind her instead the voice of a lady greeting him. She turned her head involuntarily: there was the head of Sepia rising above the breach in the haha, and Godfrey had turned aside, and run to give her his hand.

Now Letty knew Sepia by sight, from the evening she had spent at the old hall; more of her she knew nothing. From the mind of Tom, in his illness, her baleful influence had vanished like an evil dream, and Mary had not thought it necessary to let him know how falsely, contemptuously, and contemptibly, she had behaved towards him. Letty therefore had no feeling towards Sepia but one of admiration for her grace and beauty, which she could appreciate the more that they were so different from her own.

"Thank you," said Sepia, holding fast by Godfrey's hand, and coming up with a little pant. "What a lovely day it is for your haymaking! How can you afford the time to play knight-errant to a distressed damsel?"

"The hay is nearly independent of my presence," replied Godfrey. "Sun and wind have done their parts too well for my being of much use."

"Take me with you to see how they are getting on. I am as fond of hay as Bottom in his translation."

She had learned Godfrey's love of literature, and knew that one quotation may stand for much knowledge.

"I will with pleasure," said Godfrey, perhaps a little consoled in the midst of his disappointment; and they walked away, neither taking notice of Letty.

"I did not know," she said to herself, "that the two

houses had come together at last! What a handsome couple they make!"

What passed between them is scarcely worthy of record. It is enough to say that Sepia found her companion distraught, and he felt her a little invasive. In a short while they came back together, and Sepia saw Letty under the great bough of the Durnmelling oak. Godfrey handed her down the rent, careful himself not to invade Durnmelling with a single foot. She ran home, and up to a certain window with her opera-glass. But the branches and foliage of the huge oak would have concealed pairs and pairs of lovers.

Godfrey turned towards Letty. She had not stirred.

"What a beautiful creature Miss Yolland is!" she said, looking up with a smile of welcome, and a calmness that prevented the slightest suspicion of a flattering jealousy.

"I was coming to *you*," returned Godfrey. "I never saw her till her head came up over the haha.—Yes, she is beautiful—at least she has good eyes."

"They are splendid! What a wife she would make for you, cousin Godfrey! I should like to see such a two."

Letty was beyond the faintest suggestion of coquetry. Her words drove a sting to the heart of Godfrey. He turned pale. But not a word would he have spoken then, had not Letty in her innocence gone on to torture him. She sprang from the ground.

"Are you ill, cousin Godfrey?" she cried in alarm, and with that sweet tremor of the voice that shows the heart is near. "You are quite white!—Oh, dear! I've said something I oughtn't to have said! What can it be? Do forgive me, cousin Godfrey."

In her child-like anxiety she would have thrown her

arms round his neck, but her hands only reached his shoulders. He drew back: such was the nature of the man, that every sting tasted of offence. But he mastered himself, and in his turn alarmed at the idea of having possibly hurt her, caught her hands in his. As they stood regarding each other with troubled eyes, the embankment of his prudence gave way, and the stored passion broke out.

"You don't *mean* you would like to see me married, Letty?" he groaned.

"Yes, indeed, I do, cousin Godfrey! You would make such a lovely husband!"

"Ah! I thought as much! I knew you never cared for me, Letty!"

He dropped her hands, and turned half aside, like a figure warped with fire.

"I care for you more than anybody in the world—except perhaps Mary," said Letty: truthfulness was a part of her.

"And I care for you more than all the world!—more than very being—it is worthless without you. Oh, Letty! your eyes haunt me night and day! I love you with my whole soul."

"How kind of you, cousin Godfrey!" faltered Letty, trembling, and not knowing what she said. She was very frightened, but hardly knew why, for the idea of Godfrey in love with her was all but inconceivable. Nevertheless, its approach was terrible. Like a fascinated bird she could not take her eyes off his face. Her knees began to fail her; it was all she could do to stand. But Godfrey was full of himself, and had not the most shadowy suspicion of how she felt. He took her emotion for a favourable sign, and stupidly went on,—

"Letty, I can't help it! I know I oughtn't to speak

to you like this—so soon, but I can't keep quiet any longer. I love you more than the universe and its maker. A thousand times rather would I cease to live, than live without you to love me. I have loved you for years and years—longer than I know. I was loving you with heart and soul and brain and eyes when you went away and left me."

"Cousin Godfrey!" shrieked Letty, "don't you know I belong to Tom?"

And she dropped like one lifeless on the grass at his feet.

Godfrey felt as if suddenly damned; and his hell was death. He stood gazing on the white face. The world, heaven, God, and nature were dead, and that was the soul of it all, dead before him! But such death is never born of love. This agony was but the fog of disappointed self-love; and out of it suddenly rose what seemed a new power to live, but one from a lower world: it was all a wretched dream, out of which he was no more to issue, in which he must go on for ever, dreaming, yet acting as one wide awake! Mechanically he stooped and lifted the death-defying lover in his arms, and carried her to the house. He felt no thrill as he held the treasure to his heart. It was the merest material contact. He bore her to the room where his mother sat, laid her on the sofa, said he had found her under the oak tree—and went to his study, away in the roof. On a chair in the middle of the floor he sat, like a man bereft of all. Nothing came between him and suicide but an infinite scorn. A slow rage devoured his heart. Here he was, a man who knew his own worth, his faithfulness, his unchangeableness, cast over the wall of the universe, into the waste places, among the broken shards of ruin! If there was a God—and the rage in his heart declared his being—why

did he make him? To make him for such a misery was pure injustice, was wilful cruelty! Henceforward he would live above what God or woman could do to him! He rose and went to the hay-field, whence he did not return till after midnight.

He did not sleep, but he came to a resolution. In the morning he told his mother that he wanted a change; now that the hay was safe, he would have a run, he hardly knew where—possibly on the continent; she must not be uneasy if she did not hear from him for a week or two; perhaps he would have a look at the pyramids. The old lady was filled with dismay; but scarcely had she begun to expostulate, when she saw in his eyes that something was seriously amiss, and held her peace:—she had had to learn that, with both father and son.

Godfrey went, and courted distraction. Ten years before, he would have brooded: that he would not do now: the thing was not worth it! His pride was strong as ever, and both helped him to get over his suffering, and prevented him from gaining the good of it. He entrenched himself in his pride. No one should say he had not had his will! He was a strong man, and was going to prove it to himself afresh!

Thus thought Godfrey; but he is in reality a weak man who must have recourse to pride to carry him through. Only, if a man has not love enough to make a hero of him, what is he to do?

He was away a month, and came back in seeming health and spirits. But it was no small relief to him to find on his arrival that Letty was no longer at Thornwick.

She had gone through a sore time. To have made Godfrey unhappy, made her miserable; but how was she to help it? She belonged to Tom! Not once did she

entertain the thought of ceasing to be Tom's. She did not even say to herself, what would Tom do if she forgot and forsook him—and for what he could not help! for having left her because death took him away! But what was she to do? She must not remain where she was. No more must she tell his mother why she went.

She wrote to Mary, and told her she could not stay much longer. They were very kind, she said, but she must be gone before Godfrey came back.

Mary suspected the truth. The fact that Letty did not give her any reason was almost enough. The supposition also rendered intelligible the strange mixture of misery and hardness in Godfrey's behaviour at the time of Letty's old mishap. She answered begging her to keep her mind easy about the future, and her friend informed of whatever concerned her.

This much from Mary was enough to set Letty at comparative ease. She began to recover strength, and was able to write a letter to Godfrey, to leave where he would find it, in his study.

It was a lovely letter—the utterance of a simple, child-like spirit—with much in it too, I confess, that was but prettily childish. She poured out on Godfrey the affection of a woman-child. She told him what a reverence and love he had been to her always; told him, too, that it would change her love into fear, perhaps something worse, if he tried to make her forget Tom. She told him he was much too grand for her to dare love him in that way, but she could look up to him like an angel—only he must not come between her and Tom. Nothing could be plainer, simpler, honester, or stronger, than the way the little woman wrote her mind to the great man. Had he been worthy of her, he might even yet, with her help, have got above his passion in a grand way, and been a

great man indeed. But, as so many do, he only sat upon himself, kept himself down, and sank far below his passion.

When he went to his study the day after his return, he saw the letter. His heart leaped like a wild thing in a trap at sight of the ill-shaped, childish writing; but—will my lady-reader believe it?—the first thought that shot through it was—"She shall find it too late! I am not one to be left and taken at will!" When he read it, however, it was with a curling lip of scorn at the childishness of the creature to whom he had offered the heart of Godfrey Wardour. Instead of admiring the lovely devotion of the girl-widow to her boy-husband, he scorned himself for having dreamed of a creature who could not only love a fool like Tom Helmer, but go on loving him after he was dead, and that even when Godfrey Wardour had condescended to let her know he loved her. It was thus the devil befooled him. Perhaps the worst devil a man can be possessed withal, is himself. In mere madness, the man is beside himself; but in this case he is inside himself; the presiding, indwelling, inspiring spirit of him is himself, and that is the hardest of all to cast out. Godfrey rose from the reading of that letter *cured*, as he called it. But it was a cure that left the wound open as a door to the entrance of evil things. He tore the letter into a thousand pieces, and threw them in the empty grate—not even showed it the respect of burning it with fire.

Mary had got her affairs settled, and was again in the old place, the hallowed temple of so many holy memories. I do not forget it was a shop I call a temple. In that shop God had been worshipped with holiest worship—that is, obedience—and would be again. Neither do I forget that the devil had been worshipped there

too—in what temple is he not? He has fallen like lightning from heaven, but has not yet been cast out of the earth. In that shop, however, he would be worshipped no more for a season.

At once she wrote to Letty, saying the room which had been hers was at her service as soon as she pleased to occupy it: she would take her father's.

Letty breathed a deep breath of redemption, and made haste to accept the offer. But to let Mrs. Wardour know her resolve was a severe strain on her courage.

I will not give the conversation that followed her announcement that she was going to visit Mary Marston. Her aunt met it with scorn and indignation. Ingratitude, laziness, love of low company, all the old words of offence she threw afresh in her face. But Letty could not help being pleased to find that her aunt's storm no longer swamped her boat. When she began, however, to abuse Mary, calling her a low creature, who actually gave up an independent position to put herself at the beck and call of a fine lady, Letty grew angry.

"I must not sit and hear you call Mary names, aunt," she said. "When you cast me out, she stood by me. You do not understand her. She is the only friend I ever had—except Tom."

"You dare, you thankless hussy, to say such a thing in the house where you've been clothed and fed and sheltered for so many years! You're the child of your father with a vengeance! Get out of my sight."

"Aunt," said Letty, rising.

"No aunt of yours!" interrupted the wrathful woman.

"Mrs. Wardour," said Letty with dignity, "you have been my benefactor, but hardly my friend: Mary has taught me the difference. I owe you more than you will ever give me the chance of repaying you. But what

friendship could have stood for an hour the hard words you have been in the way of giving me, as far back as I can remember! Hard words take all the sweetness from shelter. Mary is the only Christian *I* have ever known."

"So we are all pagans except your low-lived lady's-maid! Upon my word!"

"She makes me feel, often, often," said Letty, bursting into tears, "as if I were with Jesus himself—as if he must be in the room somewhere."

So saying, she left her, and went to put up her things. Mrs. Wardour locked the door of the room where she sat, and refused to see or speak to her again. Letty went away, and walked to Testbridge.

"Godfrey will do something to make her understand," she said to herself, weeping as she walked.

Whether Godfrey ever did, I cannot tell.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WILLIAM AND MARY MARSTON.

THE same day on which Turnbull opened his new shop, a man was seen on a ladder painting out the sign above the old one. But the paint took time to dry.

The same day also, Mary returned to Testbridge, and going in by the kitchen door, went up to her father's room, of which and of her own she had kept the keys—to the indignation of Turnbull, who declared he did not know how to get on without them for storage. But for all his bluster he was afraid of Mary, and did not dare touch anything she had left.

That night she spent alone in the house. But she could not sleep. She got up and went down to the shop. It was a bright, moonlit night, and all the house, even where the moon could not enter, was full of glimmer and gleam, except the shop. There she lighted a candle, sat down on a pile of goods, and gave herself up to memories of the past. Back and back went her thoughts as far as she could send them. God was everywhere in all the story; and the clearer she saw him there, the surer she was that she would find him as she went on. She was neither sad nor fearful.

The dead hours of the night came, that valley of the shadow of death, where faith seems to grow weary and sleep, and all the things of the shadow wake up, and come out, and say, "Here we are, and there is nothing but us and our kind in the universe!" They woke up, and came out upon Mary now, but she fought them off. Either there is mighty, triumphant life at the root and

apex of all things, or life is not—and whence then the power of dreaming horrors? It is life alone—life imperfect—that can fear; death cannot fear. Even the terror that walketh by night is a proof that I live, and that it shall not prevail against me. And to Mary, besides her heavenly Father, her William Marston seemed near all the time. Wherever she turned she saw the signs of him, and she pleased herself to think that perhaps he was there to welcome her. But it would not have made her the least sad to know for certain that he was far off, and would never come near her again in this world. She knew that, spite of time and space, she was and must be near him so long as she loved and did the truth. She knew there is no bond so strong, none so close, none so lasting, as the truth. In God alone who is the truth, can creatures meet.

The place was left in sad confusion and dirt, and she did not a little that night to restore order at least. But at length she was tired, and went up to her room.

On the first landing there was a window to the street. She stopped and looked out, candle in hand, but drew back with a start: on the opposite side of the way stood a man, looking up, she thought, at the house! She hastened to her room, and to bed. If God was not watching, no waking was of use; and if God was watching, she might sleep in peace. She did sleep, and woke refreshed.

Her first care in the morning was to write to Letty—with the result I have set down. The next thing she did was to go and ask Beenie to give her some breakfast. The old woman was delighted to see her, and ready to lock her door at once and go back to her old quarters. They returned together, while Testbridge was yet but half awake,

Many things had to be done before the shop could be opened. Beenie went after charwomen, and soon a great bustle of cleaning arose. But the door was kept shut, and the front windows.

In the afternoon Letty came fresh from misery into more than counterbalancing joy. She took but time to put off her bonnet and shawl, and was presently at work helping Mary, cheerful as hope and a good conscience could make her.

Mary was in no hurry to open the shop. There was "stock to be taken," many things had to be rearranged, and not a few things to be added, before she could begin with comfort; and she must see to it all herself, for she was determined to engage no assistant until she could give her orders without hesitation.

She was soon satisfied that she could not do better than make a proposal to Letty which she had for some time contemplated—namely, that she should take up her permanent abode with her, and help her in the shop. Letty was charmed, nor ever thought of the annoyance it would be to her aunt. Mary had thought of that, but saw that for Letty to allow the prejudices of her aunt to influence her, would be to order her life not by the law of that God whose Son was a working man, but after the whim and folly of an ill educated old woman. A new spring of life seemed to bubble up in Letty the moment Mary mentioned the matter; and in serving she soon proved herself one after Mary's own heart. Letty's day was henceforth without a care, and her rest was sweet to her. Many customers were even more pleased with her than with Mary. Before long Mary, besides her salary, gave her a small share in the business.

Mrs. Wardour carried her custom to the Turnbells.

When the paint was dry which obliterated the old

sign, people saw the new one begin with an *M.*, and the sign-writer went on until there stood in full, *Mary Marston*. Mr. Brett hinted he would rather have seen it without the Christian name; but Mary insisted she would do and be nothing she would not hold just that name to; and on the sign her own name, neither more nor less, should stand. She would have liked, she said, to make it *William and Mary Marston*; for the business was to go on exactly as her father had taught her; the spirit of her father should never be out of the place; and if she failed, of which she had no fear, she would fail trying to carry out his ideas:—but people were too dull to understand, and she therefore set the sign so in her heart only.

Her old friends soon began to come about her again, and it was not many weeks before she saw fit to go to London to add to her stock.

The evening of her return, as she and Letty sat over a late tea, a silence fell, during which Letty had a brooding fit.

"I wonder how cousin Godfrey is getting on," she said at last, and smiled sadly.

"How do you mean *getting on*?" asked Mary.

"I was wondering whether Miss Yolland and he—"

Mary started from her seat, white as the tablecloth.

"Letty!" she said, in a voice of utter dismay, "you don't mean that woman is—is making friends with *him*?"

"I saw them together more than once, and they seemed—well, on very good terms."

"Then it is all over with him!" cried Mary, in despair. "Oh Letty! what is to be done? Why didn't you tell me before? He'll be madly in love with her by this time! They always are."

"But where's the harm, Mary? She's a very handsome lady, and of a good family."

"We're all of good enough family," said Mary, a little petulantly. "But that Miss Yolland—Letty,—that Miss Yolland—she's a bad woman, Letty."

"I never heard you say such a hard word of anybody before, Mary! It frightens me to hear you."

"It's a true word of her, Letty."

"How can you be so sure?"

Mary was silent. There was that about Letty that made the maiden shrink from telling the married woman what she knew. Besides, in so far as Tom had been concerned, she could not bring herself, even without mentioning his name, to talk of him to his wife: there was no evil to be prevented and no good to be done by it. If Letty was ever to know those passages in his life, she must hear them first in high places, and from the lips of the repentant man himself!

"I cannot tell you, Letty," she said. "You know the two bonds of friendship are the right of silence and the duty of speech. I daresay you have some things which, truly as I know you love me, you neither wish nor feel at liberty to tell me."

Letty thought of what had so lately passed between her and her cousin Godfrey, and felt almost guilty. She never thought of one of the many things Tom had done or said that had cut her to the heart; those had no longer any existence. They were swallowed in the gulf of forgetful love—dismissed even as God casts the sins of his children behind his back: behind God's back is just nowhere. She did not answer, and again there was silence for a time, during which Mary kept walking about the room, her hands clasped behind her, the fingers interlaced, and twisted with a strain almost fierce.

"There's no time! there's no time!" she cried at length. "How are we to find out? And if we knew all about it, what could we do?—Oh, Letty! what *am* I to do?"

"Anyhow, Mary dear, *you* can't be to blame! One would think you fancied yourself accountable for cousin Godfrey!"

"I *am* accountable for him. He has done more for me than any man but my father; and I know what he does not know, and what the ignorance of will be his ruin. I know that one of the best men in the world"—so in her agony she called him—"is in danger of being married by one of the worst women; and I can't bear it—I can't bear it!"

"But what can you do, Mary?"

"That's what I want to know," returned Mary, with irritation. "What *am* I to do? What *am* I to do?"

"If he's in love with her, he wouldn't believe a word any one—even you—told him against her."

"That is true, I suppose; but it won't clear me. I must do something."

She threw herself on the couch with a groan.

"It's horrid!" she cried, and buried her face in the pillow.

All this time Letty had been so bewildered by Mary's agitation, and the cause of it was to her so vague, that apprehension for her cousin did not wake. But when Mary was silent, then came the thought, that, if she had not so repulsed him—but she could not help it, and would not think in that direction!

Mary started from the couch, and began again to pace the room, wringing her hands, and walking up and down like a wild beast in its cage. It was so unlike her to be thus seriously discomposed, that Letty began to be

frightened. She sat silent and looked at her. Then spoke the spirit of truth in the scholar, for the teacher was too troubled to hear. She rose, and going up to Mary from behind, put her arm round her, and whispered in her ear,—

“Mary, why don’t you ask Jesus?”

Mary, stopped short, and looked at Letty. But she was not thinking about her; she was questioning herself: why had she not done as Letty said? Something was wrong with her: that was clear, if nothing else was! She threw herself again on the couch, and Letty saw her body heaving with her sobs. Then Letty was more frightened, and feared she had done wrong. Was it her part to remind Mary of what she knew so much better than she?

“But then I was only referring her to herself!” she thought.

A few minutes, and Mary rose. Her face was wet and white, but perplexity had vanished from it, and resolution had taken its place. She threw her arms round Letty, and kissed her, and held her face against hers. Letty had never seen in her such an expression of emotion and tenderness.

“I have found out, Letty, dear,” she said. “Thank you, thank you, Letty! You are a true sister.”

“What have you found out, Mary?”

“I have found out why I did not go at once to ask Him what I ought to do. It was just because I was afraid of what he would tell me to do.”

And with that the tears ran down her cheeks afresh.

“Then you know now what to do?” asked Letty.

“Yes,” answered Mary, and sat down.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A HARD TASK.

THE next morning, leaving the shop to Letty, Mary set out immediately after breakfast to go to Thornwick. But the duty she had there to perform was so distasteful, that she felt her very limbs refuse the office required of them. They trembled so under her that she could scarcely walk. She sent therefore to the neighbouring inn for a fly. All the way as she went, she was hoping she might be spared an encounter with Mrs. Wardour; but the old lady heard the fly, saw her get out, and imagining she had brought Letty back in some fresh trouble, hastened to prevent either of them from entering the house. The door stood open, and they met on the broad step.

"Good morning, Mrs. Wardour," said Mary, trying to speak without betraying emotion.

"Good morning, Miss Marston," returned Mrs. Wardour grimly.

"Is Mr. Wardour at home?" asked Mary.

"What is your business with *him*?" rejoined the mother.

"Yes; it is with him," returned Mary, as if she had mistaken her question, and there had been a point of exclamation after the *What*.

"About that hussy?"

"I do not know whom you call by the name," replied Mary, who would have been glad indeed to find a fellow-protector of Godfrey in his mother.

"You know well enough whom I mean. Who should it be but Letty Lovel!"

"My business has nothing to do with her," answered Mary.

"Who has it to do with then?"

"With Mr. Wardour."

"What is it?"

"Only Mr. Wardour himself must hear it. It is his business, not mine."

"I will have nothing to do with it."

"I have no desire to give you the least trouble about it," rejoined Mary.

"You can't see Mr. Wardour. He's not one to be at the beck and call of every silly woman that wants him."

"Then I will write, and tell him I called, but you would not allow me to see him."

"I will give him a message, if you like."

"Then tell him what I have just said. I am going home to write to him. Good morning."

She was getting into the fly again, when Mrs. Wardour, reflecting that it must needs be something of consequence that brought her there so early in a fly, and made her show such a determined front to so great a personage as herself, spoke again.

"I will tell him you are here; but you must not blame me if he does not choose to see you. We don't feel you have behaved well about that girl."

"Letty is my friend. I have behaved to her as if she were my sister."

"You had no business to behave to her as if she were your sister. You had no right to tempt her down to your level."

"Is it degradation to earn one's own living?"

"You had nothing to do with her. She would have done very well if you had but let her alone."

"Excuse me, ma'am, but I have *some* right in Letty.

I am sorry to have to assert it, but she would have been dead long ago if I had behaved to her as you would have me."

"That was all her own fault."

"I will not talk with you about it: you do not know the circumstances to which I refer. I request to see Mr. Wardour. I have no time to waste in useless altercation."

Mary was angry, and it did her good: it made her fitter to face the harder task before her.

That moment they heard the step of Godfrey approaching through a long passage in the rear. His mother went into the parlour, leaving the door, which was close to where Mary stood, ajar. Godfrey reaching the hall, saw Mary, and came up to her with a formal bow, and a face flushed with displeasure.

"May I speak to you alone, Mr. Wardour?" said Mary.

"Can you not say what you have to say here?"

"It is impossible."

"Then I am curious to know—"

"Let your curiosity plead for me, then."

With a sigh of impatience he yielded, and led the way to the drawing-room, which was at the other end of the hall. Mary turned and shut the door he left open.

"Why all this mystery, Miss Marston?" he said. "I am not aware of anything between you and me that can require secrecy."

He spoke with unconcealed scorn.

"When I have made my communication, you will at least allow secrecy to have been necessary."

"Some objects may require it!" said Wardour, in a tone itself an insult.

"Mr. Wardour," returned Mary, "I am here for your sake, not my own. May I beg you will not render a painful duty yet more difficult?"

"May *I* beg then that you will be as brief as possible? I am more than doubtful whether what you have to say will seem to me of so much consequence as you suppose."

"I shall be very glad to find it so."

"I cannot give you more than ten minutes."

Mary looked at her watch.

"You have lately become acquainted with Miss Yolland, I am told," she began.

"Whew!" whistled Godfrey, yet hardly as if he were surprised.

"I have been compelled to know a good deal of that lady."

"As lady's-maid in her family, I believe."

"Yes," said Mary—then changing her tone after a slight pause, went on: "Mr. Wardour, I owe you more than I can ever thank you for. I strongly desire to fulfil the obligation your goodness has laid upon me, though I can never discharge it. For the sake of that obligation—for your sake, I am risking much—namely, your opinion of me."

He made a gesture of impatience.

"I *know* Miss Yolland to be a woman without principle. I know it by the testimony of my own eyes, and from her own confession. She is capable of playing a cold-hearted cruel game for her own ends. Be persuaded to consult Mr. Redmain before you commit yourself. Ask him if Miss Yolland is fit to be the wife of an honest man."

There was nothing in Godfrey's countenance but growing rage. Turning to the door, Mary would have gone without another word.

"Stay!" cried Godfrey, in a voice of suppressed fury. "Do not dare to go until I have told you that you are a

vile slanderer. I knew something of what I had to expect, but you should never have entered this room, had I known how far your effrontery could carry you. Listen to me: if anything more than the character of your statement had been necessary to satisfy me of the falsehood of every word of it, you have given it me in your reference to Mr. Redmain—a man whose life has rendered him unfit for the acquaintance, not to say the confidence of any decent woman. This is a plot—for what final object, God knows—between you and him! I should be doing my duty were I to expose you both to the public scorn you deserve.”

“Now I am clear!” said Mary to herself, but aloud, and stood erect, with glowing face and eyes of indignation. “Then why not do your duty, Mr. Wardour? I should be glad of anything that would open your eyes. But Miss Yolland will never give Mr. Redmain such an opportunity. Nor does he desire it, for he might have had it long ago, by the criminal prosecution of a friend of hers. For my part, I should be sorry to see her brought to public shame.”

“Leave the house,” said Godfrey through his teeth, and almost under his breath.

“I am sorry it is so hard to distinguish between truth and falsehood,” said Mary, as she went to the door. She walked out, got into the fly, and drove home; went into the shop, and served the rest of the morning; but in the afternoon was obliged to lie down, and did not appear again for three days.

The reception she had met with did not much surprise her: plainly Sepia had been before her. She had pretended to make Godfrey her confidant, had invented, dressed, and poured out injuries to him, and so blocked

up the way to all testimony unfavourable to her. Was there ever man in more pitiable position?

It added to Godfrey's rage that he had not a doubt Mary knew what had passed between Letty and him. That, he reasoned, was at the root of it all: she wanted to bring them together yet: it would be a fine thing for her to have her bosom-friend mistress of Thornwick! What a cursed thing he should ever have been civil to her! And what a cursed fool he was ever to have cared a straw for such a low-minded creature as that Letty! Thank heaven, he was cured of that!

Cured?—He had fallen away from love—that was all the cure!

Like the knight of the Red Cross, he was punished for abandoning Una, by falling in love with Duesza. His rage against Letty, just because of her faithfulness, had cast him an easy prey into the arms of the clinging Sepia.

And now what more could Mary do? Just one thing was left: Mr. Redmain could satisfy Mr. Wardour of the fact he would not hear from her! so at least thought Mary yet. If Mr. Redmain would take the trouble to speak to him, Mr. Wardour must be convinced! However true might be what Mr. Wardour had said about Mr. Redmain, fact remained fact about Sepia!

She sat down and wrote the following letter:—

“Sir,—I hardly know how to address you without seeming to take a liberty; at the same time I cannot help hoping you trust me enough to believe that I would not venture such a request as I am about to make, without good reason. Should you kindly judge me not to presume, and should you be well enough in health, which I fear may not be the case, would you mind coming to see me here in my shop? I think you must know

it—it used to be Turnbull and Marston—the Marston was my father. You will see my name over the door. Any hour from morning to night will do for me; only please let it be as soon as you can make it convenient.

“I am, sir,

“Your humble and grateful servant,

“MARY MARSTON.”

“What the deuce is she grateful to me for?” grumbled Mr. Redmain when he read it. “I never did anything for her! By Jove, the gypsy herself wouldn’t let me! I vow she’s got more brains of her own than any half-dozen women I ever had to do with before!”

The least thing bearing the look of plot, or intrigue, or secret to be discovered or heard, was enough for Mr. Redmain. What he had of pride was not of the same sort as Wardour’s: it made no pretence to dignity, and was less antagonistic, so long at least as there was no talk of good motive or righteous purpose. Far from being offended with Mary’s request, he got up at once, though indeed he was rather unwell and dreading an attack, ordered his brougham, and drove to Testbridge. There, careful of secrecy, he went to several shops, and bought something at each, but pretended not to find the thing he wanted.

He then said he would lunch at the inn, told his coachman to put up, and while his meal was getting ready, went to Mary’s shop, which was but a few doors off. There he asked for a certain outlandish stuff, and insisted on looking over a bale not yet unpacked. Mary understood him, and whispering Letty to take him to the parlour, followed a minute after.

As soon as she entered,—

“Come now, what’s it all about?” he said.

Mary began at once to tell him, as directly as she could, that she was under obligation to Mr. Wardour of Thornwick, and that she had reason to fear Miss Yolland was trying to get a hold of him—"and you know what that would be for any man!" she said.

"No, by Jove! I don't," he answered. "What would it be?"

"Utter ruin," replied Mary.

"Then go and tell him so, if you want to save him."

"I have told him. But he does not like me, and won't believe me."

"Then let him take his own course, and be ruined."

"But I have just told you, sir, I am under obligation to him—great obligation!"

"Oh! I see! you want him yourself!—Well, as you wish it, I would rather you have him than that she-devil. But come now, you must be open with me."

"I am. I will be."

"You say so, of course. Women do.—But you confess you want him yourself?"

Mary saw it would be the worst possible policy to be angry with him, especially as she had given him the trouble to come to her, and she must not lose this her last chance.

"I do not want him," she answered with a smile; "and if I did, he would never look at one in my position. He would as soon think of marrying the daughter of one of his labourers—and quite right too—for the one might just be as good as the other."

"Well, now, that's a pity. I would have done a good deal for *you*—I don't know why, for you're a little humbug if ever there was one! But if you don't care about the fellow, I don't see why I should take the trouble. Confess—you're a little bit in love with him—

ain't you now? Confess to that, and I will do what I can."

"I can't confess to a lie. I owe Mr. Wardour a debt of gratitude—that is all—but no light thing, you will allow, sir!"

"I don't know; I never tried its weight. Anyhow I should make haste to be rid of it."

"I have sought to make him this return, but he only fancies me a calumniator. Miss Yolland has been beforehand with me."

"Then, by Jove! I don't see but you're quits with him. If he behaves like that to you, don't you see, it wipes it all out. Upon my soul! I don't see why you should trouble your head about him. Let him take his way, and go to—Sepia."

"But, sir, what a dreadful thing it would be, knowing what she is, to let a man like him throw himself away on her!"

"I don't see it. I've no doubt he's just as bad as she is. We all are; we're all the same. And if he weren't, it would be the better joke. Besides, you oughtn't to keep up a grudge, don't you know, you ought to let the—the *woman* have a chance. If he marries her—and that must be her game this time—she'll grow decent, and be respectable ever after, you may be sure—go to church, as you would have her, and all that—nev-er miss a Sunday, I'll lay you a thousand."

"He's of a good old family!" said Mary foolishly, thinking that would weigh with him.

"Good old fiddlestick! Damned old worn-out broom-end! *She's* of a good old family—quite good enough for his, you may take your oath! Why, my girl! the thing's not worth burning your fingers with. You've brought me here on a goose-errand. I'll go and have my lunch."

He rose.

"I'm sorry to have vexed you, sir," said Mary, greatly disappointed.

"Never mind.—I'm horribly sold," he said, with a tight grin. "I thought you must have some good thing in hand to make it worth your while to send for me."

"Then I must try something else," reflected Mary aloud.

"I wouldn't advise you. The man's only the surer to hate you and stick to her. Let him alone. If he's a stuck-up fellow like that, it will take him down a bit—when the truth comes out, that is, as come out it must. There's one good thing in it, my wife'll get rid of her. But I don't know! there's an enemy, as the Bible says, that sticketh closer than a brother. And they'll be next door when Durnmelling is mine! But I can sell it."

"If he *should* come to you, will you tell him the truth?"

"I don't know that. It might spoil my own little game."

"Will you let him think me a liar and slanderer?"

"No, by Jove! I won't do that. I don't promise to tell him all the truth, or even that what I do tell him shall be exactly true; but I won't let him think ill of my little puritan: that would spoil *your* game. Ta, ta!"

He went out, with his curious grin, amused, and enjoying the idea of a proud fellow like that being taken in with Sepia.

"I hope devoutly he'll marry her!" he said to himself as he went to his luncheon. "Then I shall hold a rod over them both, and perhaps buy that miserable little Thornwick. Mortimer would give the skin off his back for it."

The thing that ought to be done had to be done, and Mary had done it—alas! to no purpose for the end

desired: what was left her to do further? She could think of nothing. Sepia, like a moral hyena, must range her night. She went to bed, and dreamed she was pursued by a crowd, hooting after her, and calling her all the terrible names of those who spread evil reports. She woke in misery, and slept no more.

CHAPTER XXV.

A SUMMONS.

ONE hot Saturday afternoon, in the sleepest time of the day, when nothing was doing, and nobody in the shop, except a poor boy who had come begging for some string to help him fly his kite, though for the last month wind had been more scarce than string, Jemima came in from Durnmelling, and greeting Mary with the warmth of the friendship that had always been true between them, gave her a letter.

"Who is this from?" asked Mary, with the usual human waste of inquiry, seeing she held the surest answer in her hand.

"Mr. Mewks gave it me," said Jemima. "He didn't say who it was from."

Mary made haste to open it: she had an instinctive distrust of everything that passed through Mewks's hands, and greatly feared that, much as his master trusted him, he was not true to him. She found the following note from Mr. Redmain:—

"Dear Miss Marston,—Come and see me as soon as you can; I have something to talk to you about. Send

word by the bearer when I may look for you. I am not well.

“Yours truly,

“F. G. REDMAIN.”

Mary went to her desk, and wrote a reply, saying she would be with him the next morning, about eleven o'clock. She would have gone that same night, she said, but, as it was Saturday, she could not, because of country customers, close in time to go so far.

“Give it into Mr. Redmain's own hand, if you can, Jemima,” she said.

“I will try; but I doubt if I can, miss,” answered the girl.

“Between ourselves, Jemima,” said Mary, “I do not trust that man Mewks.”

“Nobody does, miss, except the master and Miss Yol-land.”

“Then,” thought Mary, “the thing is worse than I had supposed.”

“I'll do what I can, miss,” Jemima went on. “But he's so sharp!—Mr. Mewks, I mean.”

After she was gone, Mary wished she had given her a verbal message: that she might have insisted on delivering in person.

Jemima, with circumspection, managed to reach Mr. Redmain's room unencountered, but just as she knocked at the door, Mewks came behind her from somewhere, and snatching the letter out of her hand, for she carried it ready to justify her entrance to the first glance of her irritable master, pushed her rudely away, and immediately went in. But as he did so he put the letter in his pocket.

“Who took the note?” asked his master.

“The girl at the lodge, sir.”

"Is she not come back yet?"

"No, sir, not yet. She'll be in a minute, though. I saw her coming up the avenue."

"Go and bring her here."

"Yes, sir."

Mewks went, and in two minutes returned with the letter, and the message that Miss Marston hadn't time to direct it.

"You damned rascal! I told you to bring the messenger here."

"She ran the whole way, sir, and not being very strong, was that tired, that, the moment she got in, the poor thing dropped in a dead faint. They 'ain't got her to yet."

His master gave him one look straight in the eyes, then opened the letter, and read it.

"Miss Marston will call here to-morrow morning," he said: "see that *she* is shown up at once—here, to my sitting-room. I hope I am explicit."

When the man was gone, Mr. Redmain nodded his head three times, and grinned the skin tight as a drum-head over his cheek-bones.

"There isn't a damned soul of them to be trusted!" he said to himself, and sat silently thoughtful.

Perhaps he was thinking how often he had come short of the hope placed in him: times of reflection arrive to most men; and a threatened attack of the illness he believed must one day carry him off, might well have disposed him to think.

In the evening he was worse.

By midnight he was in agony, and Lady Margaret was up with him all night. In the morning came a lull, and Lady Margaret went to bed. His wife had not come near him. But Sepia might have been seen, more than once or twice, hovering about his door.

Both she and Mewks thought, after such a night, he must have forgotten his appointment with Mary.

When he had had some chocolate, he fell into a doze. But his sleep was far from profound. Often he woke and again dozed off.

The clock in the dressing-room struck eleven.

"Show Miss Marston up the moment she arrives," he said—and his voice was almost like that of a man in health.

"Yes, sir," replied the startled Mewks, and felt he must obey.

So Mary was at once shown to the chamber of the sick man.

To her surprise, for Mewks had given her no warning, he was in bed, and looking as ill as ever she had seen him. His small head was like a skull covered with parchment. He made the slightest of signs to her to come nearer—and again. She went close to the bed. Mewks sat down at the foot of it, out of sight. It was a great four-post-bed, with curtains.

"I'm glad you're come," he said, with a feeble grin, all he had for a smile. "I want to have a little talk with you. But I can't while that brute is sitting there. I have been suffering horribly. Look at me, and tell me if you think I am going to die—not that I take your opinion for worth anything. That's not what I wanted you for, though. I wasn't so ill then. But I want you the more to talk to now. *You* have a bit of a heart, even for people that don't deserve it—at least I'm going to believe you have; and if I am wrong, I almost think I would rather not know it till I'm dead and gone!—Good God! where shall I be then?"

I have already said that, whether in consequence of remnants of mother-teaching, or from the movements of a conscience that had more vitality than any of his so-

called friends would have credited it with, Mr. Redmain, as often as his sufferings reached a certain point, was subject to fits of terror—horrible anguish it sometimes amounted to—at the thought of hell. This of course was silly, seeing hell is out of fashion in far wider circles than that of Mayfair; but denial does not alter fact, and not always fear. Mr. Redmain laughed when he was well, and shook when he was suffering. In vain he argued with himself that what he held by when in health, was much more likely to be true than a dread which might be but the suggestion of the disease that was slowly gnawing him to death: as often as the sickness returned, he received the suggestion afresh, whatever might be its source, and trembled as before. In vain he accused himself of cowardice—the thing was there—in *him*—nothing could drive it out. And verily even a madman may be wiser than the prudent of this world; and the courage of not a few would forsake them if they dared but look the danger in the face. I pity the poor ostrich, and must I admire the man of whose kind he is the type, or take him in any sense for a man of courage? Wait till the thing stares you in the face, and then, whether you be brave man or coward, you will at all events care little about courage or cowardice. The nearer a man is to being a true man, the sooner will conscience of wrong make a coward of him; and herein Redmain had a far-off kindred with the just. After the night he had passed, he was now in one of his terror-fits; and this much may be said for his good sense—that, if there was anywhere a hell for the use of anybody, he was justified in anticipating a free entrance.

“Mewks!” he called suddenly, and his tone was loud and angry.

Mewks was by his bedside instantly.

"Get out with you. If I find you in this room again without having been called, I will kill you. I am strong enough for that, even without this pain. They won't hang a dying man, and where I am going they will rather like it."

Mewks vanished.

"You need not mind, my girl," he went on to Mary. "Everybody knows I am ill—very ill. Sit down there on the foot of the bed, only take care you don't shake it, and let me talk to you. People, you know, say nowadays there ain't any hell—or perhaps none to speak of?"

"I should think the former more likely than the latter," said Mary.

"You don't believe there is any? I *am* glad of that! for you are a good girl, and ought to know."

"You mistake me, sir. How can I imagine there is no hell, when *he* said there was?"

"Who's *he*?"

"The man who knows all about it, and means to put a stop to it some day."

"Oh, yes; I see! Hm!—But I don't for the life of me see what a fellow is to make of it all—don't you know? Those parsons! They will have it there's no way out of it but theirs, and I never could see a handle anywhere to that door!"

"I don't see what the parsons have got to do with it, or at least what you have got to do with the parsons. If a thing is true, you have as much to do with it as any parson in England; if it is not true, neither you nor they have anything to do with it."

"But I tell you, if it be all as true as—as—that we are all sinners, I don't know what to do with it!"

"It seems to me a simple thing. *That* man as much

as said he knew all about it, and came to find men that were lost, and take them home."

"He can't well find one more lost than I am! But how am I to believe it! How *can* it be true! It's ages since he was here, if ever he was at all, and there hasn't been a sign of him ever since, all the time!"

"There you may be quite wrong. I think I could find you some who believe him just as near them now as ever he was to his own brothers—believe that he hears them when they speak to him, and heeds what they say."

"That's bosh. You would have me believe against the evidence of my senses!"

"You must have strange senses, Mr. Redmain, that give you evidence where they can't possibly know anything! If that man spoke the truth when he was in the world, he is near us now; if he is not near us, there is an end of it all."

"The nearer he is, the worse for me!" sighed Mr. Redmain.

"The nearer he is, the better for the worst man that ever breathed."

"That's queer doctrine! Mind you, I don't say it mayn't be all right. But it does seem a cowardly thing to go asking him to save you, after you've been all your life doing what ought to damn you—if there be a hell, mind you, that is."

"But think," said Mary: "if that should be your only chance of being able to make up for the mischief you have done? No punishment you can have will do anything for that. No suffering of yours will do anything for those you have made suffer. But it is so much harder to leave the old way, than to go on and let things take their chance!"

"There may be something in what you say; but still I can't see it anything better than sneaking, to do a world of mischief, and then slink away into heaven, leaving all the poor wretches to look after themselves."

"I don't think Jesus Christ is worse pleased with you for feeling like that," said Mary.

"Eh? What? What's that you say?—Jesus Christ worse pleased with me? That's a good one! As if he ever thought about a fellow like me!"

"If he did not, you would not be thinking about him just this minute, I suspect. There's no sense in it, if he does not think about you. He said himself he didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

"I wish I could repent."

"You can, if you will."

"I can't make myself sorry for what's gone and done with."

"No; it wants him to do that. But you can turn from your old ways, and ask him to take you for a pupil. Ain't you willing to learn, if he be willing to teach you?"

"I don't know. It's all so dull and stupid! I never could bear going to church."

"It's not one bit like that! It's like going to your mother, and saying you're going to try to be a good boy, and not vex her any more."

"I see. It's all right, I daresay! But I've had as much of it as I can stand! You see I'm not used to such things. You go away, and send Mewks. Don't be far off though; and mind you don't go home without letting me know. There! Go along."

She had just reached the door, when he called her again.

"I say! Mind whom you trust in this house. There's no harm in Mrs. Redmain; she only grows stupid directly she don't like a thing. But that Miss Yolland! that woman's the devil. I know more about her than you or any one else. I can't bear her to be about Hesper; but if I told her the half I know, she would not believe the half of that. I shall find a way though. But I am forgetting! you know her as well as I do—that is, you would if you were wicked enough to understand. I will tell you one of these days what I am going to do. There! don't say a word. I want no advice on *such* things. Go along, and send Mewks."

With all his suspicion of the man, Mr. Redmain did not suspect *how* false Mewks was: he did not know that Miss Yolland had bewitched him for the sake of having an ally in the enemy's camp. All he could hear—and the dressing-room door was handy—the fellow duly reported to her. Already, instructed by her fears, she had almost divined what Mr. Redmain meant to do.

Mary went and sat on the lowest step of the stair just outside the room.

"What are you doing there?" said Lady Margaret, coming from the corridor.

"Mr. Redmain will not have me go yet, my lady," answered Mary, rising. "I must wait first till he sends for me."

Lady Margaret swept past her, murmuring, "Most peculiar!" Mary sat down again.

In about an hour, Mewks came and said his master wanted her.

He was very ill, and could not talk, but he would not let her go. He made her sit where he could see her, and now and then stretched out his hand to her.

Even in his pain he showed a quieter spirit. "Something may be working—who can tell!" thought Mary.

It was late in the afternoon when at length he sought further conversation.

"I have been thinking, Mary," he said, "that if I do wake up in hell when I die, no matter how much I deserve it, nobody will be the better for it, and I shall be all the worse."

He spoke with coolness, but it was by a powerful effort: he had waked from a frightful dream, drenched from head to foot. Coward? No. He had reason to fear.

"Whereas," rejoined Mary, taking up his clue, "everybody will be the better if you keep out of it—everybody," she repeated, "—God, and Jesus Christ, and all their people."

"How do you make that out?" he asked. "God has more to do than look after such as me."

"You think he has so many worlds to look to—thousands of them only making? But why does he care about his worlds? Is it not because they are the schools of his souls? And why should he care for the souls? Is it not because he is making them children—his own children to understand him, and be happy with his happiness?"

"I can't say I care for his happiness. I want my own. And yet I don't know any that's worth the worry of it. No; I would rather be put out like a candle."

"That's because you have been a disobedient child, taking your own way, and turning God's good things to evil. You don't know what a splendid thing life is. You actually and truly don't know, never experienced in your being the very thing you were made for."

"My father had no business to leave me so much money."

"You had no business to misuse it."

"I didn't *quite* know what I was doing."

"You do now."

Then came a pause.

"You think God hears prayer—do you?"

"I do."

"Then I wish you would ask him to let me off—I mean, to let me die right out when I do die. What's the good of making a body miserable?"

"That, I am sure it would be of no use to pray for. He certainly will not throw away a thing he has made, because that thing may be foolish enough to prefer the dust-hole to a cabinet."

"Wouldn't you do it now, if I asked you?"

"I would not. I would leave you in God's hands rather than inside the gate of heaven."

"I don't understand you. And you wouldn't say so if you cared for me! Only why should you care for me!"

"I would give my life for you."

"Come now! I don't believe that."

"Why, I couldn't be a Christian if I wouldn't!"

"You are getting absurd!" he cried. But he did not look exactly as if he thought it.

"Absurd!" repeated Mary. "Isn't that what makes *him* our Saviour? How could I be his disciple, if I wouldn't do as he did?"

"You are saying a good deal!"

"Can't you see that I have no choice?"

"*I* wouldn't do that for anybody under the sun!"

"You are not his disciple. You have not been going about with him."

"And you have?"

"Yes—for many years. Besides, I cannot help thinking there is one for whom you would do it."

"If you mean my wife, you never were more mistaken. I would do nothing of the sort."

"I did not mean your wife. I mean Jesus Christ."

"Oh, I daresay!—Well, perhaps!—if I knew him as you do—and if I were quite sure he wanted it done for him."

"He does want it done for him—always and every day—not for his own sake, though it does make him very glad. To give up your way for his is to die for him; and when anyone will do that, then he is able to do everything for him; for then, and not till then, he gets such a hold of him that he can lift him up, and set him down beside himself. That's how my father used to teach me, and now I see it for myself to be true."

"It's all very grand, no doubt; but it ain't nowhere, you know. It's all in your own head, and nowhere else. You don't, you *can't* positively believe all that!"

"So much at least, that I live in the strength and hope it gives me, and order my ways according to it."

"Why didn't you teach my wife so?"

"I tried, but she didn't care to think. I could not get any farther with her. She has had no trouble yet to make her listen."

"By Jove! I should have thought marrying a fellow like me might have been trouble enough to make a saint of her."

It was impossible to fix him to any line of thought, and Mary did not attempt it. To move the child in him was more than all argument.

A pause followed.

"I don't love God," he said.

"I daresay not," replied Mary. "How should you, when you don't know him?"

"Then what's to be done? I can't very well show myself where I hate the master of the house!"

"If you knew him, you would love him."

"You are judging by yourself. But there is as much difference between you and me as between light and darkness."

"Not quite that," replied Mary, with one of those smiles that used to make her father feel as if she were that moment come fresh from God to him. "If you knew Jesus Christ, you could not help loving him, and to love him is to love God."

"You wear me out! Will you never come to the point? *Know Jesus Christ!* How am I to go back two thousand years?"

"What he was then, he is now," answered Mary. "And you may even know him better than they did at the time who saw him; for it was not until they understood him better by his being taken from them, that they wrote down his life."

"I suppose you mean I must read the New Testament?" said Mr. Redmain pettishly.

"Of course!" answered Mary, a little surprised; for she was unaware how few have a notion what the New Testament is, or is meant for.

"Then why didn't you say so at first?—There I have you! That's just where I learn that I must be damned for ever!"

"I don't mean the Epistles. Those you can't understand—yet."

"I'm glad you don't mean *them*. I hate them."

"I don't wonder. You have never seen a single shine of what they are; and what most people think them is hardly the least like them. What I want you to read is the life and death of the son of man, the master of men."

"I can't read. I should only make myself twice as ill. I won't try."

"But I will read to you, if you will let me."

"How comes it you are such a theologian? A woman is not expected to know about that sort of thing."

"I am no theologian. There just comes one of the cases in which those who call themselves his followers do not believe what the master said: he said God hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to babes. I had a father who was child enough to know them, and I was child enough to believe him, and so grew able to understand them for myself. The whole secret is to do the thing the master tells you: then you will understand what he tells you. The opinion of the wisest man, if he does not do the things he reads, is not worth a rush. He may be partly right, but you have no reason to trust him."

"Well, you shall be my chaplain. To-morrow, if I'm able to listen, you shall see what you can make of the old sinner."

Mary did not waste words: where would have been the use of pulling up the poor spiritual clodpole at every lumbering step, at any word inconsistent with the holy manners of the high countries? Once get him to court, and the power of the presence would subdue him, and make him over again from the beginning, without which absolute renewal the best observance of religious etiquette is worse than worthless. Many good people are such sticklers for the proprieties! For myself, I take joyous refuge with the grand simple everyday humanity of the man I find in the story—the man with the heart like that of my father and my mother and my brothers and sisters. If I may but see and help to show him a little as he lived to show himself, and not as church talk and

church ways and church ceremonies and church theories and church plans of salvation and church worldliness generally have obscured him for hundreds of years, and will yet obscure him for hundreds more!

Towards evening, when she had just rendered him one of the many attentions he required, and which there was no one that day but herself to render, for he would scarcely allow Mewks to enter the room, he said to her,—

“Thank you; you are very good to me. I shall remember you. Not that I think I’m going to die just yet; I’ve often been as bad as this, and got quite well again. Besides, I want to show that I have turned over a new leaf. Don’t you think God will give me one more chance, now that I really mean it? I never did before.”

“God can tell whether you mean it without that,” she answered, not daring to encourage him where she knew nothing. “But you said you would remember me, Mr. Redmain: I hope you didn’t mean in your will.”

“I did mean in my will,” he answered, but in a tone of displeasure. “I must say, however, I should have preferred you had not *shown* quite such an anxiety about it. I shan’t be in my coffin to-morrow; and I’m not in the way of forgetting things.”

“I *beg* you,” returned Mary, flushing, “to do nothing of the sort. I have plenty of money, and don’t care about more. I would much rather not have any from you.”

“But think how much good you might do with it!” said Mr. Redmain satirically. “—It was come by honestly—so far as I know.”

“Money can’t do half the good people think. It is stubborn stuff to turn to any good. And in this case it would be directly against good.”

"Nobody has a right to refuse what comes honestly in his way. There's no end to the good that may be done with money—to judge at least by the harm I've done with mine," said Mr. Redmain, this time with seriousness.

"It is not in it," persisted Mary. "If it had been, our Lord would have used it, and he never did."

"Oh, but he was all an exception!"

"On the contrary, he is the only man who is no exception. We are the exceptions. Every one but him is more or less out of the straight. Do you not see?—he is the very one we must all come to be the same as, or perish! No, Mr. Redmain! don't leave me any money, or I shall be altogether bewildered what to do with it. Mrs. Redmain would not take it from me. Miss Yolland might, but I dared not give it to her. And for societies, I have small faith in them."

"Well, well! I'll think about it," said Mr. Redmain, who had now got so far on the way of life, as to be capable of believing that when Mary said a thing she meant it, though he was quite incapable of understanding the true relations of money. Few indeed are the Christians capable of that! The most of them are just where Peter was, when, the moment after the Lord had honoured him as the first to recognize him as the Messiah, he took upon him to object altogether to his master's way of working salvation in the earth. The Roman emperors took up Peter's plan, and the devil has been in the church ever since—Peter's Satan, whom the master told to get behind him. They are poor prophets, and no martyrs, who honour money as an element of any importance in the salvation of the world. Hunger itself does incomparably more to make Christ's kingdom come than ever money did, or ever will do while time lasts.

Of course money has its part, for everything has; and whoever has money is bound to use it as best he knows; but his best is generally an attempt to do saint-work by devil-proxy.

"I can't think where on earth you got such a sackful of extravagant notions!" Mr. Redmain added.

"I told you before, sir, I had a father who set me thinking!" answered Mary.

"I wish I had had a father like yours," he rejoined.

"There are not many such to be had."

"I fear mine wasn't just what he ought to be, though he can't have been such a rascal as his son: he hadn't time; he had his money to make."

"He had the temptation to make it, and you have the temptation to spend it: which is the more dangerous, I don't know. Each has led to many crimes."

"Oh, as to crimes—I don't know about that! It depends on what you call crimes."

"It doesn't matter whether men call a deed a crime or a fault; the thing is how God regards it, for that is the only truth about it. What the world thinks, goes for nothing, because it is never right. It would be worse in me to do some things the world counts perfectly honourable, than it would be for this man to commit a burglary, or that a murder. I mean my guilt might be greater in committing a respectable sin, than theirs in committing a disreputable one."

Had Mary known anything of science, she might have said, that, in morals as in chemistry, the qualitative analysis is easy, but the quantitative another affair.

The latter part of this conversation, Sepia listening heard, and misunderstood utterly.

All the rest of the day Mary was with Mr. Redmain, mostly by his bedside, sitting in silent watchfulness

when he was unable to talk with her. Nobody entered the room except Mewks, who, when he did, seemed to watch everything, and try to hear everything, and once Lady Margaret. When she saw Mary seated by the bed, though she must have known well enough she was there, she drew herself up with grand English repellence, and looked scandalized. Mary rose, and was about to retire. But Mr. Redmain motioned her to sit still.

"This is my spiritual adviser, Lady Margaret," he said.

Her ladyship cast a second look on Mary, such as few but her could cast, and left the room.

On into the gloom of the evening Mary sat. No one brought her anything to eat or drink, and Mr. Redmain was too much taken up with himself, soul and body, to think of her. She was now past hunger, and growing faint, when, through the settled darkness, the words came to her from the bed:—

"I should like to have you near me when I am dying, Mary."

The voice was a softer than she had yet heard from Mr. Redmain, and its tone went to her heart.

"I will certainly be with you, if God please," she answered.

"There's no fear of God," returned Mr. Redmain; "it's the devil will try to keep you away. But never you heed what anyone may do or say to prevent you. Do your very best to be with me. By that time I may not be having my own way any more. Be sure, the first moment they can get the better of me, they will. And you mustn't place confidence in a single soul in this house. I don't say my wife would play me false so long as I was able to swear at her, but I wouldn't trust her one moment longer. You come and be with me in spite of the whole posse of them."

"I will try, Mr. Redmain," she answered faintly. "But indeed you must let me go now, else I may be unable to come to-morrow."

"What's the matter?" he asked hurriedly, half lifting his head with a look of alarm. "There's no knowing," he went on, muttering to himself, "what may happen in this cursed house."

"Nothing," replied Mary, "but that I have not had anything to eat since I left home. I feel rather faint."

"They've given you nothing to eat!" cried Mr. Redmain, but in a tone that seemed rather of satisfaction than displeasure. "Ring—no, don't."

"Indeed, I would rather not have anything now till I get home," said Mary. "I don't feel inclined to eat where I am not welcome."

"Right! right! right!" said Mr. Redmain. "Stick to that. Never eat where you are not welcome. Go home directly. Only say when you will come to-morrow."

"I can't very well during the day," answered Mary. "There is so much to be done, and I have so little help. But if you should want me, I would rather shut up the shop than not come."

"There is no need for that! Indeed I would much rather have you in the evening. The first of the night is worst of all. It's then the devils are out.—Look here," he added, after a short pause, during which Mary, for as unfit as she felt, hesitated to leave him, "—being in business, you've got a lawyer, I suppose?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Then you go to him to-night, the first thing, and tell him to come to me to-morrow, about noon. Tell him I am ill, and in bed, and particularly want to see him; and he mustn't let anything they say keep him from me, not even if they tell him I am dead."

"I will," said Mary, and, stroking the thin hand that lay outside the counterpane, turned and left him.

"Don't tell any one you are gone," he called after her, with a voice far from feeble. "I don't want any of their damned company."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

MARY left the house, and saw no one on her way. But it was better, she said to herself, that he should lie there untended, than be waited on by unloving hands.

The night was very dark. There was no moon, and the stars were hidden by thick clouds. She must walk all the way to Testbridge. She felt weak, but the fresh air was reviving. She did not know the way so familiarly as that between Thornwick and the town, but she would enter the latter before arriving at the common.

She had not gone far when the moon rose, and from behind the clouds diminished the darkness a little. The first part of her journey lay along a narrow lane, with a small ditch, a rising bank, and a hedge, on each side. About the middle of the lane was a farmyard, and a little way further a cottage. Soon after passing the gate of the farmyard, she thought she heard steps behind her, seemingly soft and swift, and naturally felt a little apprehension; but her thoughts flew to the one hiding-place for thoughts and hearts and lives, and she felt no terror. At the same time something moved her to quicken her pace. As she drew near the common, she heard the steps more plainly, still soft and swift, and almost wished she had sought refuge in the cottage she

had just passed—only it bore no very good character in the neighbourhood. When she reached the spot where the paths united, feeling a little at home, she stopped to listen. Behind her were the footsteps plain enough! The same moment the clouds thinned about the moon, and a pale light came filtering through upon the common in front of her. She cast one look over her shoulder, saw something turn a corner in the lane, and sped on again. She would have run, but there was no place of refuge now nearer than the corner of the turnpike road, and she knew her breath would fail her long before that. How lonely and shelterless the common looked! The soft, swift steps came nearer and nearer.

Was that music she heard? She dared not stop to listen. But immediately thereupon was poured forth on the dim air such a stream of pearly sounds as if all the necklaces of some heavenly choir of woman-angels were broken, and the beads came pelting down in a cataract of hurtless hail. From no source could they come save the bow and violin of Joseph Jasper! Where could he be? She was so rejoiced to know he must be somewhere near, that, for very delight of unsecured safety, she held her peace, and had almost stopped. But she ran on again.

She was now nigh the ruined hut with which my narrative has made the reader acquainted. In the meantime the moon had been growing out of the clouds, clearer and clearer. The hut came in sight. But the look of it was somehow altered—with an undefinable change, such as might appear on a familiar object in a dream; and leaning against the side of the door stood a figure she could not mistake for another than her musician. Absorbed in his music, he did not see her. She called out, "Joseph! Joseph!" He started, threw

his bow from him, tucked his violin under his arm, and bounded to meet her. She tried to stop, and the same moment to look behind her. The consequence was that she fell—but safe in the smith's arms. That instant appeared a man running. He half stopped, and turning from the path took to the common. Jasper handed his violin to Mary, and darted after him. The chase did not last a minute; the man was nearly spent. Joseph seized him by the wrist, saw something glitter in his other hand, and turned sick. The fellow had stabbed him. With indignation, as if it were a snake that had bit him, the blacksmith flung from him the hand he held. The man gave a cry, staggered, recovered himself, and ran. Joseph would have followed again, but fell, and for a minute or two lost consciousness. When he came to himself, Mary was binding up his arm.

“What a fool I am!” he said, trying to get up, but yielding at once to Mary's prevention. “Ain't it ridic'ulous now, miss, that a man of my size, and ready to work a sledge with any smith in Yorkshire, should turn sick for a little bit of a job with a knife? But my father was just the same, and he was a stronger man than I'm like to be, I fancy.”

“It is no such wonder as you think,” said Mary; “you have lost a good deal of blood.”

Her voice faltered. She had been greatly alarmed—and the more that she had not light enough to get the edges of the wound properly together.

“You've stopped it—'ain't you, miss?”

“I think so.”

“Then I'll be after the fellow.”

“No, no; you must not attempt it. You must lie still a while. But I don't understand it at all! That cottage

used to be a mere hovel, without door or window! It can't be you live in it?"

"Ay, that I do! and it's not a bad place either," answered Joseph. "That's what I went to Yorkshire to get my money for. It's mine—bought and paid for."

"But what made you think of coming here?"

"Let's go into the smithy—house I won't presume to call it," said Joseph, "though it has a lean-to for the smith—and I'll tell you everything about it. But really, miss, you oughtn't to be out like this after dark. There's too many vagabonds about."

With but little need of the help Mary yet gave him, Joseph got up, and led her to what was now a respectable little smithy, with forge and bellows and anvil and bucket. Opening a door where had been none, he brought a chair, and making her sit down, began to blow the covered fire on the hearth, where he had not long before "boiled his kettle" for his tea. Then closing the door, he lighted a candle, and Mary looking about her could scarcely believe the change that had come upon the miserable vacuity. Joseph sat down upon his anvil, and begged to know where she had just been, and how far she had run from the rascal. When he had learned something of the peculiar relations in which Mary stood to the family at Durnmelling, he began to think there might have been something more in the pursuit than a chance ruffianly assault, and the greater were his regrets that he had not secured the miscreant.

"Anyhow, miss," he said, "you'll never come from there alone in the dark again!"

"I understand you, Joseph," answered Mary, "for I know you would not have me leave doing what I can for the poor man up there, because of a little danger in the way."

"No, that I wouldn't, miss. That would be as much as to say you would do the will of God when the devil would let you. What I mean is, that here am I—your slave, or servant, or soldier, or whatever you may please to call me, ready at your word."

"I must not take you from your work, you know, Joseph."

"Work's not everything, miss," he answered; "and it's seldom so pressing but that—except I be shoeing a horse—I can leave it when I choose. Any time you want to go anywhere, don't forget as you've got enemies about, and just send for me. You won't have long to wait till I come.—But I am main sorry the rascal didn't have something to keep him in mind of his manners."

Part of this conversation, and a good deal more, passed on their way to Testbridge, whither, as soon as Joseph seemed all right, Mary, who had forgotten her hunger and faintness, insisted on setting out at once. In her turn she questioned Joseph, and learned that as soon as he knew she was going to settle at Testbridge, he started off to find if possible a place in the neighbourhood humble enough to be within his reach, and near enough for the hope of seeing her sometimes, and having what help she might please to give him. The explanation afforded Mary more pleasure than she cared to show. She had a real friend near her—one ready to help her on her own ground—one who understood her because he understood the things she loved! He told her that already he had work enough to keep him going; that the horses he once shod were always brought to him again; that he was at no expense such as in a town; and that he had plenty of time both for his violin and his books.

When they came to the suburbs, she sent him home, and went straight to Mr. Brett with Mr. Redmain's mes-

sage. He undertook to be at Durnmelling at the time appointed, and to let nothing prevent him from seeing his new client.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE NEXT NIGHT.

MR. BRETT found no difficulty in the way of the interview, for Mr. Redmain had given Mewks instructions he dared not disobey: his master had often ailed, and recovered again, and he must not venture too far! As soon as he had shown the visitor into the room, he was dismissed, but not before he had satisfied himself that he was a lawyer. He carried the news at once to Sepia, and it wrought no little anxiety in the house. There was a will already in existence, and no ground for thinking a change in it boded anything good. Mr. Mortimer never deigned to share his thoughts, anxieties, or hopes with any of his people; but the ladies met in deep consultation, although of course there was nothing to be done. The only operative result was that it let Sepia know how, though for reasons somewhat different, her anxiety was shared by the others: unlike theirs, her sole desire was—*not* to be mentioned in the will: that could only be for the sake of leaving her a substantial curse! Mr. Redmain's utter silence, after, as she well knew, having gathered damning facts to her discredit, had long convinced her he was but biding his time. Certain she was he would not depart this life without leaving his opinion of her and the proofs of its justice behind him, carrying weight as the affidavit of a dying man. Also she knew Hesper well enough to be certain that, however she

might delight in opposition to the desire of her husband, she would for the sake of no one carry that opposition to a point where it became injurious to her interests. Sepia's one thought therefore was: could not something be done to prevent the making of another will, or the leaving of any fresh document behind him? What he might already have done, she could nowise help; what he might yet do, it would be well to prevent. Once more, therefore, she impressed upon Mewks, and that in the names of Mrs. Redmain and Lady Margaret, as well as in her own person, the absolute necessity of learning as much as possible of what might pass between his master and the lawyer.

Mewks was driven to the end of his wits, and they were not a few, to find excuses for going into the room, and for delaying to go out again, while with all his ears he listened. But both client and lawyer were almost too careful for him; and he had learned positively nothing when the latter rose to depart. He instantly left the room, with the door a trifle ajar, and listening intently, heard his master say that Mr. Brett must come again the next morning; that he felt better, and would think over the suggestions he had made; and that he must leave the memoranda within his reach, on the table by his bedside. Ere the lawyer issued, Mewks was on his way with all this to his tempter.

Sepia concluded there had been some difference of opinion between Mr. Redmain and his adviser, and hoped that nothing had been finally settled. Was there any way to prevent the lawyer from seeing him again? Could she by any means get a peep at the memoranda mentioned? She dared not suggest the thing to Hesper or Lady Malice—of all people they were those in relation to whom she feared their possible contents—and she dared

not show herself in Mr. Redmain's room. Was Mewks to be trusted to the point of such danger as grew in her thought?

The day wore on. Towards evening he had a dreadful attack. Any other man would have sent before now for what medical assistance the town could afford him, but Mr. Redmain hated having a stranger about him, and as he knew how to treat himself, it was only when very ill that he would send for his own doctor to the country, fearing that otherwise he might give him up as a patient, such visits, however well remunerated, being seriously inconvenient to a man with a large London practice. But now Lady Margaret took upon herself to send a telegram.

An hour before her usual time for closing the shop, Mary set out for Durnmelling; and at the appointed spot on the way, found her squire of low degree in waiting. At first sight, however, and although she was looking out for him, she did not certainly recognize him. I would not have my reader imagine Joseph one of those fools who delight in appearing something else than they are; but while every workman ought to look a workman, it ought not to be by looking less of a man, or of a *gentleman* in the true sense; and Joseph, having, out of respect to her who would honour him with her company, dressed himself in a new suit of unpretending grey, with a wide-awake hat, looked at first sight more like a country gentleman having a stroll over his farm, than a man whose hands were hard with the labours of the forge. He took off his hat as she approached—if not with ease yet with the clumsy grace peculiar to him; for, unlike many whose manners are unobjectionable, he had in his something that might be called his own. But the best of it was,

that he knew nothing about his manners, beyond the desire to give honour where honour was due.

He walked with her to the door of the house; for they had agreed that, from whatever quarter had come the pursuit, and whatever might have been its object, it would be well to show that she was attended. They had also arranged at what hour, and at what spot close at hand, he was to be waiting to accompany her home. But, although he said nothing about it, Joseph was determined not to leave the place until she rejoined him.

It was nearly dark when he left her; and when he had wandered up and down the avenue a while, it seemed dark enough to return to the house, and reconnoitre a little.

He had already made the acquaintance of the farmer who occupied a portion of the great square, behind the part where the family lived: he had had several of his horses to shoe, and had not only given satisfaction by the way in which he shod them, but had interested their owner with descriptions of more than one rare mode of shoeing to which he had given attention; he was therefore the less shy of being discovered about the place.

From the back he found his way into the roofless hall, and there paced quietly up and down, measuring the floor, and guessing at the height and thickness of the walls, and the sort of roof they had borne. He noted that the wall of the house rose higher than those of the ruin with which it was in contact; and that there was a window in it just over one of those walls. Thinking whether it had been there when the roof was on, he saw through it the flickering of a fire, and wondered whether it could be the window of Mr. Redmain's room.

Mary, having resolved not to give any notice of her arrival, if she could get in without it, and finding the

hall-door on the latch, entered quietly, and walked straight to Mr. Redmain's bedroom. When she opened the door of it, Mewks came hurriedly to meet her, as if he would have made her go out again, but she scarcely looked at him, and advanced to the bed. Mr. Redmain was just waking from the sleep into which he had fallen after a severe paroxysm.

"Ah, there you are!" he said, smiling her a feeble welcome. "I am glad you are come. I have been looking out for you. I am very ill. If it comes again to-night, I think it will make an end of me."

She sat down by the bedside. He lay quite still for some time, breathing like one very weary. Then he seemed to grow easier, and said, with much gentleness,—

"Can't you talk to me?"

"Would you like me to read to you?" she asked.

"No," he answered; "I can't bear the light; it makes my head furious."

"Shall I talk to you about my father?" she asked.

"I don't believe in fathers," he replied. "They're always after some notion of their own. It's not their children they care about."

"That may be true of some fathers," answered Mary; "but it is not the least true of mine."

"Where is he? Why don't you bring him to see me, if he is such a good man? He might be able to do something for me."

"There is none but your own father can do anything for you," said Mary. "My father is gone home to him, but if he were here, he would only tell you about *him*."

There was a moment's silence.

"Why don't you talk?" said Mr. Redmain crossly. "What's the good of sitting there saying nothing! How

am I to forget that the pain will be here again, if you don't say a word to help me?"

Mary lifted up her heart, and prayed for something to say to the sad human soul that had never known the Father. But she could think of nothing to talk about except the death of William Marston. So she began with the dropping of her watch, and telling whatever seemed at the moment fit to tell, ended with the dream she had the night of his funeral. By that time the hidden fountain was flowing in her soul, and she was able to speak straight out of it.

"I cannot tell you, sir," she said, closing the story of her dream, "what a feeling it was! The joy of it was beyond all expression."

"You're not surely going to offer me a dream in proof of anything!" muttered the sick man.

"Yes," answered Mary, "—in proof of what it can prove. The joy of a child over a new toy, or a coloured sweetmeat, shows of what bliss the human soul is made capable."

"Oh, capable, I daresay!"

"And more than that," Mary went on, adding instead of replying, "no one ever felt such gladness without believing in it. There must be somewhere the justification of such gladness. There must be the father of it somewhere."

"Well! I don't like to say, after your kindness in coming here to take care of me, that you talk the worst rubbish I ever heard; but just tell me of what use is it all to me, in the state I am in! What I want is to be free of pain, and have some pleasure in life—not to be told about a father."

"But what if the father you don't want, is determined you shall not have what you do want? What if your de-

sire is not worth keeping you alive for? And what if he is ready to help your smallest effort to be the thing he wants you to be—and in the end to give you your heart's desire?"

"It sounds very fine, but it's all so thin, so up in the clouds! It don't seem to have a leg to stand upon. Why, if that were true, everybody would be good! there would be none but saints in the world! What's in it, I'm sure I don't know."

"It will take ages to know what is in it; but if you should die now, you will be glad to find, on the other side, that you have made a beginning. For my part, if I had everything my soul could desire, except God with me, I could but pray that he would come to me, or not let me live a moment longer; for it would be but the life of a devil."

"What do you mean by a devil?"

"A power that lives against its life," said Mary.

Mr. Redmain answered nothing. He did not perceive an atom of sense in the words. They gave him not a glimmer. Neither will they to many of my readers; while not a few will think they see all that is in them, and see nothing.

He was silent for a long time—whether he waked or slept she could not tell.

The annoyance was great in the home-conclave when Mewks brought the next piece of news—namely that there was that designing Marston in the master's room again, and how ever she got into the house he was sure *he* didn't know.

"All the same thing over again, miss!—hard at it a tryin' to convert 'im!—And where's the use, you know, miss? If a man like my master's to be converted and

get off, I don't for my part see where's the good o' keepin' up a devil."

"I am quite of your opinion, Mewks," said Sepia.

But in her heart she was ill at ease.

All day long she had been haunted with an ever-recurring temptation which, instead of dismissing it, she kept like a dog in a string. Different kinds of evil affect people differently. Ten thousand will do a dishonest thing, who would indignantly reject the dishonest thing favoured by another ten thousand. They are not sufficiently used to its ugly face not to dislike it, though it may not be quite so ugly as their protégé. A man will feel grandly honest against the dishonesties of another trade than his, and be eager to justify those of his own. Here was Sepia, who did not care the dust of a butterfly's wing for causing any amount of family misery, who would without a pang have sacrificed the genuine reputation of an innocent man to save her own false one—shuddering at an idea as yet bodiless in her brain—an idea which, however, she did not dismiss, and so grew able to endure!

I have kept this woman—so far as personal acquaintance with her is concerned, in the background of my history. For one thing, I am not fond of post-mortem examinations;—in other words, I do not like searching the decompositions of moral carrion. Analysis of such is, like the use of reagents on dirt, at least unpleasant. Nor was any true end to be furthered by a more vivid presentation of her. Nosology is a science doomed, thank God, to perish. Health alone will at last fill the earth. Or if there should be always the ailing to help, a man will help them by being sound himself, not by knowing the ins and outs of disease. Diagnosis is not therapy.

Sepia was unnatural—as every one is unnatural who

does not set his face in the direction of the true Nature; but she had gone farther in the opposite direction than many people have yet reached. At the same time whoever has not faced about is on the way to a capacity for worse things than even our enemies would believe of us.

Her very existence seemed to her now at stake. If by his dying act Mr. Redmain should drive her from under Hesper's roof, what was to become of her! Durnmelling too would then be as certainly closed against her, and she would be compelled to take a situation, and teach music, which she hated, and French and German, which gave her no pleasure apart from certain strata of their literature, to insolent girls whom she would be constantly wishing to strangle, or stupid little boys who would bore her to death. Her very soul sickened at the thought—as well it might; for to have to do such service with such a heart as hers, must indeed be torment. All hope of marrying Godfrey Wardour would be gone of course. Did he but remain uncertain as to the truth or falsehood of a third part of what Mr. Redmain would record against her, he would never meet her again!

Since the commencement of this last attack of Mr. Redmain's malady, she had scarcely slept; and now what Mewks reported, rendered her nigh crazy. For some time she had been generally awake half the night, and all the last night she had been wandering here and there about the house, not unfrequently couched where she could hear every motion in Mr. Redmain's room. Haunted by fear, she in turn haunted her fear. She could not keep from staring down the throat of the pit. She was a slave of the morrow, the undefined awful morrow, ever about to bring forth no one knows what. That morrow could she but forestall!

If any should think that anxiety and watching must

have so wrought on Sepia that she came to be no longer accountable for her actions, I will not oppose the kind conclusion. For my own part, until I shall have seen a man absolutely one with the source of his being, I do not believe I shall ever have seen a man absolutely sane. What many would point to as plainest proofs of sanity, I should regard as surest signs of the contrary.

A sign of my own insanity is it?

Your insanity may be worse than mine, for you are aware of none, and I with mine do battle. I believe all insanity has moral as well as physical roots. But enough of this. There are questions we can afford to leave.

Sepia had got very thin during these trying days. Her great eyes were larger yet, and filled with a troubled anxiety. Not paleness, for of that her complexion was incapable, but a dull pallor possessed her cheek. If one had met her as she roamed the house that night, he might well have taken her for some naughty ancestor, whose troubled conscience, not yet able to shake off the madness of some evil deed, made her wander still about the place where she had committed it.

She believed in no supreme power who cares that right should be done in his worlds. Here, it may be, some of my unbelieving acquaintances, foreseeing a lurid something on the horizon of my story, will be indignant that the capacity for crime should be thus associated with the denial of a Live Good. But it remains a mere fact that it is easier for a man to commit a crime when he does not fear a willed retribution. Tell me there is no merit in being prevented by fear; I answer, the talk is not of merit. As the world is, that is, as the race of men at present is, it is just as well that the man who has no merit and never dreamed of any, should yet be a little hindered from cutting his neighbour's throat at his

evil pleasure.—No; I do not mean hindered by a lie;—I mean hindered by the poorest apprehension of the grandest truth.

Of those who do not believe, some have never had a noble picture of God presented to them; but whether their phantasm is of a mean God because they refuse him, or they refuse him because their phantasm of him is mean, who can tell? Anyhow, mean notions must come of meanness, and, uncharitable as it may appear, I cannot but think there is a moral root to all chosen unbelief. But let God himself judge his own.

With Sepia what was *best* meant what was best for her, and *best for her* meant *most after her liking*.

She had in her time heard a good deal about *euthanasia*, and had taken her share in advocating it. I do not assume this to be anything additional against her; one who does not believe in God, may in such an advocacy indulge a humanity pitiful over the irremediable ills of the race; and, being what she was, she was no worse necessarily for advocating that than for advocating cremation, which she did—occasionally, I must confess, a little coarsely. But the notion of *euthanasia* might well work for evil in a mind that had not a thought for the ease any more than for the betterment of humanity, or indeed for anything but its own consciousness of pleasure or comfort. Opinions, like drugs, work differently on different constitutions. Hence the man is foolish who goes scattering vague notions regardless of the soil on which they may fall.

She was used to asking the question—What's the good? but always in respect of something she wanted out of her way.

“What's the good of an hour or two more if you're not enjoying it?” she said to herself again and again that

Monday. "What's the good of living when life is pain—or fear of death, from which no fear can save you?" But the question had no reference to her own life: she was judging for another—and for another not for his sake, or from his point of view, but for her own sake, and from where she stood.

All the day she wandered about the house, such thoughts as these in her heart, and in her pocket a bottle of that concentrated which Mr. Redmain was taking much diluted for medicine. But she *hoped not to have to use it*. If only Mr. Redmain would yield the conflict, and depart without another interview with the lawyer!

But if he would not, and two drops from the said bottle, not taken by herself, but by another, would save her, all her life to come, from endless anxiety and grinding care, from weariness and disgust, and indeed from want; nor that alone, but save likewise that other from an hour, or two hours, or perhaps a week, or possibly two weeks, or—who could tell?—it might be a month of pain and moaning and weariness, would it not be well?—must it not be more than well?

She had not learned to fear temptation; she feared poverty, dependence, humiliation, labour, *ennui*, misery. The thought of the life that must follow and wrap her round in the case of the dreaded disclosure, was unendurable; the thought of the suggested frustration was not *so* unendurable—was not absolutely unendurable—was to be borne—might be permitted to come—to return—was cogitated—now with imagined resistance, now with reluctant and partial acceptance, now with faint resolve, and now determined resolution—now with the beaded drops pouring from the forehead, and now with a cold scornful smile of triumphant foil and success.

Was she so very exceptionally bad however? You

who hate your brother or your sister — you do not think yourself at all bad! But you are a murderer, and she was only a murderer. You do not feel wicked? How do you know she did? Besides, you hate, and she did not hate; she only wanted to take care of herself. Lady Macbeth did not hate Duncan; she only wanted to give her husband his crown. You only hate your brother; you would not, you say, do him any harm; and I believe you would not do him mere bodily harm; but were things changed, so that hate-action became absolutely safe, I should have no confidence what you might not come to do. No one can tell what wreck a gust of passion upon a sea of hate may work. There are men a man might well kill, if he were anything less than ready to die for them. The difference between the man that hates and the man that kills, may be nowhere but in the courage. These are *gruesome* thinkings: let us leave them—but hating with them.

All the afternoon, Sepia hovered about Mr. Redmain's door, down upon Mewks every moment he appeared. Her head ached, she could hardly breathe. Rest she could not. Once when Mewks, coming from the room, told her his master was asleep, she crept in, and softly approaching the head of the bed, looked at him from behind, then stole out again.

"He seems dying, Mewks," she said.

"Oh, no, miss! I've often seen him as bad. He's better."

"Who's that whispering?" murmured the patient angrily, though half asleep.

Mewks went in, and answered,

"Only me and Jemima, sir."

"Where's Miss Marston?"

"She's not come yet, sir."

"I want to go to sleep again. You must wake me the moment she comes."

"Yes, sir."

Mewks went back to Sepia.

"His voice is much altered," she said.

"He most always speaks like that now, miss, when he wakes—very different from I used to know him! He'd always swear bad when he woke; but Miss Marston do seem t' 'ave got a good deal of that out of him. Anyhow, this last two days he's scarce swore enough to make it feel homelike."

"It's death has got it out of him," said Sepia. "I don't think he can last the night through. Fetch me at once if—. And don't let that Marston into the room again, whatever you do."

She spoke with the utmost emphasis, plainly clenching instructions previously given, then went slowly up the stair to her own room. Surely he would die to-night, and she would not be led into temptation! She would then have but to get a hold of the paper! What a hateful and unjust thing it was that her life should be in the power of that man—a miserable creature, himself hanging between life and death! that such as he should be able to determine her fate, and say whether she was to be comfortable or miserable all the rest of a life that was to outlast his so many years! It was absurd to talk of a Providence! She must be her own providence!

She stole again down the stair. Her cousin was in her own room safe with a novel, and there was Mewks fast asleep in an easy chair in the study, with the doors of the dressing-room and chamber ajar! She crept into the sick-room. There was the tumbler with the medicine! and her fingers were on the phial in her pocket. The dying man slept.

She drew near the table by the bed. He stirred as if about to awake. Her limbs, her brain seemed to rebel against her will.—But what folly it was! the man was not for this world a day longer: what could it matter whether he left it a few hours earlier or later? The drops on his brow rose from the pit of his agony; every breath was a torture: it were mercy to help him across the verge: if to more life, he would owe her thanks; if to endless rest, he would never accuse her.

She took the phial from her pocket. A hand was on the lock of the door! She turned and fled through the dressing-room and study, waking Mewks as she passed. He, hurrying into the chamber, saw Mary already entered.

When Sepia learned who it was that had scared her, she felt she could kill her with less compunction than Mr. Redmain. She hated her far worse.

“You *must* get the viper out of the house, Mewks,” she said. “It is all your fault she got into the room.”

“I’m sure I’m willing enough,” he answered, “—even if it wasn’t you as as’t me, miss! But what am I to do? She’s that brazen, you wouldn’ believe, miss! It wouldn’ be becomin’ to tell you what I think that young woman fit to do.”

“I don’t doubt it,” responded Sepia. “But surely,” she went on, “the next time he has an attack, and he’s certain to have one soon, you will be able to get her hustled out!”

“No, miss—least of all just then. She’ll make that a pretence for not going a yard from the bed—as if me that’s been about him so many years didn’t know what oughto be done with him in his paroxes of pain better than the likes of her! Of all things I do loathe a row, miss—and the talk of it after; and sure I am that with-

out a row we don't get her out of that room. The only way is to be quiet, and seem to trust her, and watch for the chance of her going out—then shut her out, and keep her out."

"I believe you are right," returned Sepia, almost with a hope that no such opportunity might arrive, but at the same time growing more determined to take advantage of it if it should.

Hence partly it came that Mary met with no interruption to her watching and ministering. Mewks kept coming and going—watching her, and waiting his opportunity. Mr. Redmain scarcely heeded him, only once and again saying in sudden anger, "What can that idiot be about? He might know by this time I'm not likely to want *him* so long as *you* are in the room!"

And said Mary to herself, "Who knows what good the mere presence of one who trusts may be to him, even if he shouldn't seem to take much of what she says! Perhaps he may think of some of it after he is dead—who knows? Patient she sat and waited, full of help that would have flowed in a torrent, but which she felt only trickle from her heart like a stream that is lost on the face of the rock down which it flows.

All at once she bethought herself, and looked at her watch: Joseph had been waiting for her more than an hour, and would not, she knew, if he stopped all night, go away without her! And for her, she could not forsake the poor man her presence seemed to comfort! He was now lying very still: she would slip out and send Joseph away, and be back before the patient or anyone else should miss her!

She went softly from the room, and glided down the stairs, and out of the house, seeing no one—but not unseen: hardly was she from the room, when the door of it

was closed and locked behind her, and hardly from the house, when the house-door also was closed and locked behind her. But she heard nothing, and ran, without the least foreboding of mishap, to the corner where Joseph was to meet her.

There he was, waiting as patient as if the hour had not yet come.

"I can't leave him, Joseph. My heart won't let me," she said. "I cannot go back before the morning. I will look in upon you as I pass."

So saying, and without giving him time to answer, she bade him good-night, and ran back to the house, hoping to get in as before without being seen. But to her dismay she found the door already fast, and concluded the hour had arrived when the house was shut up for the night. She rang the bell, but there was no answer—for there was Mewks himself standing close behind the door, grinning like his master an evil grin. As she knocked and rang in vain, the fact flashed upon her that she was intentionally excluded. She turned away, overwhelmed with a momentary despair. What was she to do? There stood Joseph! She ran back to him, and told him they had shut her out.

"It makes me miserable," she went on, "to think of the poor man calling me, and me nowhere to answer. The worst of it is I seem the only person he has any faith in, and what I have been telling him about the father of us all, whose love never changes, will seem only the idler tale, when he finds I am gone, and nowhere to be found—as they're sure to tell him. There's no saying what lies they mayn't tell him about my going! Rather than go, I will sit on the doorstep all night, just to be able to tell him in the morning that I never went home."

"Why have they done it, do you think?" asked Joseph.

"I dare hardly allow myself to conjecture," answered Mary. "None of them like me but Jemima—not even Mrs. Redmain now, I am afraid; for you see I never got any of the good done her I wanted, and till something of that was done, she could not know how I felt towards her. I shouldn't a bit wonder if they fancy I have a design on his money—as if anybody fit to call herself a woman, would condescend to such a thing! But when a woman would marry for money, she may well think as bad of another woman."

"This is a serious affair," said Joseph. "To have a dying man believe you false to him would be dreadful! We must find some way in. Let us go to the kitchen-door."

"If Jemima happened to be near, then perhaps!" rejoined Mary; "but if they want to keep me out, you may be sure Mewks has taken care of one door as well as another. He knows I'm not so easy to keep out."

"If you did get in," said Joseph, speaking in a whisper as they went, "would you feel quite safe after this?"

"I have no fear. I daresay they would lock me up somewhere if they could, before I got to Mr. Redmain's room: once in, they would not dare touch me."

"I shall not go out of hearing so long as you are in that house," said Joseph with decision. "Not until I have you out again do I leave the premises. If anything should make you feel uncomfortable, you cry out, miss, and I'll make a noise at the door that everybody at Thornwick over there shall hear me."

"It is a large house, Joseph: one might call in many a part of it, and never be heard out of doors. I don't

think you could hear me from Mr. Redmain's room," said Mary, with a little laugh, for she was amused as well as pleased at the protection Joseph would give her: "it is up two flights, and he chose it himself for the sake of being quiet when he was ill."

As she spoke, they reached the door they sought—the most likely of all to be still open: it was fast and dark as if it had not been unbolted for years. One or two more entrances they tried, but with no better success.

"Come this way," whispered Joseph. "I know a place where we shall at least be out of their sight, and where we can plan at our leisure."

He led her to the back entrance to the old hall. Alas, even that was closed!

"This is disappointing," he said; "for if we were only in there, I think something might be done."

"I believe I know a way," said Mary, and led him to a place near, used for a wood-shed.

At the top of a great heap of sticks and faggots was an opening in the wall, that had once been a window, or perhaps a door.

"That, I know, is the wall of the tower," she said; "and there can be no difficulty in getting through there. Once in, it will be easy to reach the hall—that is, if the door of the tower is not locked."

In an instant Joseph was at the top of the heap, and through the opening, hanging on, and feeling with his feet. He found footing at no distance, and presently Mary was beside him. They descended softly, and found the door into the hall wide open.

"Can you tell me what window is that," whispered Joseph, "just above the top of the wall?"

"I cannot," answered Mary. "I never could go about this house as I did about Mr. Redmain's; my lady always

looked so fierce if she saw me trying to understand the place. But why do you ask?"

"You see the flickering of a fire? Could it be Mr. Redmain's room?"

"I cannot tell. I do not think it. That has no window in this direction, so far as I know. But I could not be certain."

"Think how the stairs turn as you go up, and how the passages go to the room. Think in what direction you look every corner you turn. Then you will know better whether or not it might be."

Mary was silent, and thought. In her mind she followed every turn she had to take from the moment she entered the house till she got to the door of Mr. Redmain's room, and then thought how the windows lay when she entered it. Her conclusion was that one side of the room must be against the hall, but she could remember no window in it.

"But," she added, "I never was in that room when I was here before, and the twice I have now been in it, I was too much occupied to take much notice of things about me. Two windows, I know, look down into a quiet little corner of the courtyard, where there is an old pump covered with ivy. I remember no other."

"Is there any way of getting on to the top of that wall from this tower?" asked Joseph.

"Certainly there is. People often walk round the top of those walls. They are more than thick enough for that."

"Are you able to do it?"

"Yes, quite. I have been round them more than once. But I don't like the idea of looking in at a window."

"No more do I, miss; but you must remember, if it

is his room, it will only be your eyes going where the whole of you has a right to be; and if it should not be that room, they have driven you to it: such a necessity will justify it."

"You must be right," answered Mary, and turning led the way up the stair of the tower, and through a gap in the wall out upon the top of the great walls.

It was a sultry night. A storm was brooding between heaven and earth. The moon was not yet up, and it was so dark that they had to feel their way along the wall, glad of the protection of a fence of thick ivy on the outer side. Looking down into the court on the one hand, and across the hall to the lawn on the other, they saw no living thing in the light from various windows, and there was little danger of being discovered. In the gable was only the one window for which they were making. Mary went first as better knowing the path, also as having the better right to look in. Through the window, as she went, she could see the flicker, but not the fire. All at once came a great blaze. It lasted but a moment—long enough, however, to let them see plainly into a small closet, the door of which was partly open.

"That is the room, I do believe," whispered Mary. "There is a closet, but I never was in it."

"If only the window be not bolted!" returned Joseph.

The same instant Mary heard the voice of Mr. Redmain call in a tone of annoyance—"Mary! Mary Marston! I want you. Who is that in the room?—Damn you! who are you?"

"Let me pass you," said Joseph, and, making her hold to the ivy, here spread on to the gable, he got between Mary and the window. The blaze was gone, and the fire was at its old flicker. The window was not

bolted. He lifted the sash. A moment and he was in. The next, Mary was beside him.

Something, known to her only as an impulse, induced Mary to go softly to the door of the closet, and peep into the room. She saw Hesper, as she thought, standing—side-wise to the closet—by a chest of drawers invisible from the bed. A candle stood on the farther side of her. She held in one hand the tumbler from which, repeatedly that evening, Mary had given the patient his medicine: into this she was pouring, with an appearance of care, something from a small dark bottle.

With a sudden suspicion of foul play, Mary glided swiftly into the room, and on to where she stood. It was Sepia! She started with a smothered shriek, turned white, and almost dropped the bottle; then seeing who it was, recovered herself. But such a look as she cast on Mary! such a fire of hate as throbbed out of those great black eyes! Mary thought for a moment she would dart at her. But she turned away, and walked swiftly to the door. Joseph, however, peeping in behind Mary, had caught a glimpse of the bottle and tumbler, also of Sepia's face. Seeing her not retiring with the bottle in her hand, he sprang after her, and, thanks to the fact that she had locked the door, was in time to snatch it from her. She turned like a wild beast, and a terrible oath came hissing as from a feline throat. When, however, she saw, not Mary, but the unknown figure of a powerful man, she turned again to the door, and fled. Joseph shut and locked it, and went back to the closet. Mary drew near the bed.

"Where have you been all this time?" asked the patient querulously; "and who was that went out of the room just now? What's all the hurry about?"

Anxious he should be neither frightened nor annoyed, Mary replied to the first part of his question only.

"I had to go and tell a friend who was waiting for me, that I shouldn't be home to-night. But here I am now, and I will not leave you again."

"How did the door come to be locked? And who was that went out of the room?"

While he was thus questioning, Joseph crept softly out of the window; and all the rest of the night he lay on the top of the wall under it.

"It was Miss Yolland," answered Mary.

"What business had she in my room?"

"She shall not enter it again while I am here."

"Don't let Mewks in either," he rejoined. "I heard the door unlock and lock again: what did it mean?"

"Wait till to-morrow. Perhaps we shall find out then."

He was silent a little.

"I must get out of this house, Mary," he sighed at length.

"When the doctor comes, we shall see," said Mary.

"What! is the doctor coming? I am glad of that. Who sent for him?"

"I don't know; I only heard he was coming."

"But your lawyer, Mary—what's his name?—will be here first: we'll talk the thing over with him, and take his advice. I feel better, and shall go to sleep again."

All night long Mary sat by him and watched. Not a step, so far as she knew, came near the door; certainly not a hand was laid upon the lock. Mr. Redmain slept soundly, and in the morning was beyond a doubt better.

But Mary could not think of leaving him until Mr. Brett came. At Mr. Redmain's request she rang the bell. Mewks made his appearance with the face of a ghost. His master told him to bring his breakfast.

"And see, Mewks," he added, in a tone of gentleness that terrified the man, so unaccustomed was he to such from the mouth of his master—"see that there is enough for Miss Marston as well. She has had nothing all night. Don't let my lady have any trouble with it.—Stop," he cried, as Mewks was going, "I won't have you touch it either—I am fastidious this morning. Tell the young woman they call Jemima to come here to Miss Marston."

Mewks slunk away. Jemima came, and Mr. Redmain ordered her to get breakfast for himself and Mary. It was done speedily, and Mary remained in the sick-chamber until the lawyer arrived.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DISAPPEARANCE.

"I AM afraid I must ask you to leave us now, Miss Marston," said Mr. Brett, seated with pen, ink, and paper, to receive his new client's instructions.

"No," said Mr. Redmain; "she must stay where she is. I fancy something happened last night which she has got to tell us about."

"Ah! What was that?" asked Mr. Brett, facing round on her.

Mary began her story with the incident of her having been pursued by some one, and rescued by the blacksmith, whom she told her listeners she had known in London. Then she narrated all that had happened the night before, from first to last, not forgetting the flame that lighted the closet as they approached the window.

"Just let me see those memoranda," said Mr. Brett

to Mr. Redmain, rising, and looking for the paper where he had left it the day before.

"It was of that paper I was this moment thinking," answered Mr. Redmain.

"It is not here!" said Mr. Brett.

"I thought as much! The fool! There was a thousand pounds there for her! I didn't want to drive her to despair: a dying man must mind what he is about. Ring the bell and see what Mewks has to say to it."

Mewks came, in evident anxiety.

I will not record his examination. Mr. Brett took it for granted he had deliberately and intentionally shut out Mary, and Mewks did not attempt to deny it, protesting he believed she was boring his master. The grin on that master's face at hearing this was not very pleasant to behold. When examined as to the missing paper, he swore by all that was holy he knew nothing about it.

Mr. Brett next requested the presence of Miss Yolland. She was nowhere to be found. The place was searched throughout, but there was no trace of her.

When the doctor arrived, the bottle Joseph had taken from her was examined, and its contents discovered.

Lady Malice was grievously hurt at the examination she found had been going on.

"Have I not nursed you like my own brother, Mr. Redmain?" she said.

"You may be glad you have escaped a coroner's inquest in your house, Lady Margaret!" said Mr. Brett.

"For me," said Mr. Redmain, "I have not many days left me, but somehow a fellow does like to have his own!"

Hesper sought Mary, and kissed her with some appearance of gratitude. She saw what a horrible suspicion, perhaps even accusation, she had saved her from. The

behaviour and disappearance of Sepia seemed to give her little trouble.

Mr. Brett got enough out of Mewks to show the necessity of his dismissal, and the doctor sent from London a man fit to take his place.

Almost every evening, until he left Durnmelling, Mary went to see Mr. Redmain. She read to him, and tried to teach him, as one might an unchildlike child. And something did seem to be getting into, or waking up in him. The man had never before in the least submitted; but now it looked as if the watching spirit of life were feeling through the dust-heap of his evil judgments, low thoughts, and bad life, to find the thing that spirit had made, lying buried somewhere in the frightful tumult: when the two met and joined, then would the man be saved; God and he would be together. Sometimes he would utter the strangest things—such as if all the old evil modes of thinking and feeling were in full operation again; and sometimes for days Mary would not have an idea what was going on in him. When suffering he would occasionally break into fierce and evil language, then be suddenly silent. God and Satan were striving for the man, and victory would be with him with whom the man should side.

For some time it remained doubtful whether this attack was not after all going to be the last: the doctor himself was doubtful, and, having no reason to think his death would be a great grief in the house, did not hesitate much to express his doubt. And indeed it caused no gloom. For there was little love in the attentions the Mortimers paid him; and in what other hope could Hesper have married, than that one day she would be free, with a freedom informed with power, the power of money! But to the mother's suggestions as to possible

changes in the future, the daughter never responded: she had no thought of plans in common with her.

Strange rumours came abroad. Godfrey Wardour heard something of them, and laughed them to scorn. There was a conspiracy in that house to ruin the character of the loveliest woman in creation! But when week after week passed, and he heard nothing of or from her, he became anxious, and at last lowered his pride so far as to call on Mary, under the pretence of buying something in the shop.

His troubled look filled her with sympathy, but she could not help being glad afresh that he had escaped the snares laid for him. He looked at her searchingly, and at last murmured a request that she would allow him to have a little conversation with her.

She led the way to her parlour, closed the door, and asked him to take a seat. But Godfrey was too proud, or too agitated, to sit.

"You will be surprised to see me on such an errand, Miss Marston!" he said.

"I do not yet know your errand," replied Mary; "but I may not be so much surprised as you think."

"Do not imagine," said Godfrey stiffly, "that I believe a word of the contemptible reports in circulation. I come only to ask you to tell me the real nature of the accusations brought against Miss Yolland: your name is of course coupled with them."

"Mr. Wardour," said Mary "if I thought you would believe what I told you, I would willingly do as you ask me. As it is, allow me to refer you to Mr. Brett, the lawyer, whom I daresay you know."

Happily the character of Mr. Brett was well known in Testbridge, and all the country round; and from him Godfrey Wardour learned what sent him travelling on the

continent again—not in the hope of finding Sepia. What became of her, none of her family ever learned.

Some time after, it came out that the same night on which the presence of Joseph rescued Mary from her pursuer, a man speaking with a foreign accent went to one of the surgeons in Testbridge to have his shoulder set, which he said had been dislocated by a fall. When Joseph heard it, he smiled, and thought he knew what it meant.

Hesper was no sooner in London than she wrote to Mary, inviting her to go and visit her. But Mary answered she could no more leave home, and must content herself with the hope of seeing Mrs. Redmain when she came to Durnmelling.

So long as her husband lived, the time for that did not again arrive; but when Mary went to London, she always called on her, and generally saw Mr. Redmain. But they never had any more talk about the things Mary loved most. That he continued to think of those things, she had one ground of hoping, namely the kindness with which he invariably received her, and the altogether gentler manner he wore as often and as long as she saw him. Whether the change was caused by something better than physical decay, who knows save him who can use even decay for redemption? He lived two years more, and died rather suddenly. After his death, and that of her father, which followed soon, Hesper went again to Durnmelling, and behaved better to her mother than before. Mary sometimes saw her, and a flicker of genuine friendship began to appear on Hesper's part.

Mr. Turnbull was soon driving what he called a roaring trade. He bought and sold a great deal more than Mary, but she had business sufficient to employ her days, and leave her nights free, and bring her and Letty

enough to live on as comfortably as they desired—with not a little over, to use, when occasion was, for others, and something to lay by for the time of lengthening shadows.

Turnbull seemed to have taken a lesson from his late narrow escape, for he gave up the worst of his speculations, and confined himself to "*genuine business-principles*;"—the more contentedly that, all Marston folly swept from his path, he was free to his own interpretation of the phrase. He grew a rich man, and died happy—so his friends said, and said as they saw. Mrs. Turnbull left Testbridge, and went to live in a small county-town where she was unknown. There she was regarded as the widow of an officer in her Majesty's service, and as there was no one within a couple of hundred miles to support an assertion to the contrary, she did not think it worth her while to make one:—was not the supposed brevet a truer index to her consciousness of herself than the actual ticket by ill luck attached to her—Widow of a linen-draper?

George carried on the business; and when Mary and he happened to pass in the street, they nodded to each other.

Letty was diligent in business, but it never got into her heart. She continued to be much liked, and in the shop was delightful. If she ever had another offer of marriage, the fact remained unknown. She lived to be a sweet gracious little old lady—and often forgot that she was a widow, but never that she was a wife. All the days of her appointed time she waited till her change should come, and she should find her Tom on the other side, looking out for her, as he had said he would. Her mother-in-law could not help dying; but she never "forgave" her—for what, nobody knew.

After a year or so, Mrs. Wardour began to take a little notice of her again; but she never asked her to Thornwick until she found herself dying. Perhaps she then remembered a certain petition in the Lord's prayer. But will it not be rather a dreadful thing for some people if they are forgiven as they forgive?

Old Mr. Duppa died, and a young man came to minister to his congregation who thought the baptism of the spirit of more importance than the most correct of opinions concerning even the baptizing spirit. From him Mary found she could learn, and would be much to blame if she did not learn. From him Letty also heard what increased her desire to be worth something before she went to rejoin Tom.

Joseph Jasper became once more Mary's pupil. She was now no more content with her little cottage piano, but had an instrument of quite another capacity on which to accompany the violin of the blacksmith.

To him trade came in steadily, and before long he had to build a larger shoeing-shed. From a wide neighbourhood horses were brought him to be shod, cart-wheels to be tired, axles to be mended, ploughshares to be sharpened, and all sorts of odd jobs to be done. He soon found it necessary to make arrangement with a carpenter and wheelwright to work on his premises. Before two years were over, he was what people call a flourishing man, and laying by a little money.

"But," he said to Mary, "I can't go on like this, you know, miss. I don't want money. It must be meant to do something with, and I must find out what that something is."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A CATASTROPHE.

ONE winter evening, as soon as his work was over for the day, Joseph locked the door of his smithy, washed himself well, put on clean clothes, and taking his violin, set out for Testbridge: Mary was expecting him to tea. It was the afternoon of a holiday, and she had closed early.

Was there ever a happier man than Joseph that night as he strode along the footpath? A day of invigorating and manly toil behind him, folded up in the sense of work accomplished; a clear sky overhead, beginning to breed stars; the pale amber hope of to-morrow's sunrise low down in the west; a frosty air around him, challenging to the surface the glow of the forge which his day's labour had stored in his body; his heart and brain at rest with his father in heaven; his precious violin under his arm; before him the welcoming parlour, where two sweet women waited his coming, one of them the brightest angel, in or out of heaven, to him; and the prospect of a long evening of torrent-music between them—who, I repeat could have been more blessed, heart, and soul, and body, than Joseph Jasper? His being was like an all-sided lens concentrating all joys in the one heart of his consciousness. God only knows how blessed he could make us if we would but let him! He pressed his violin-case to his heart, as if it were a living thing that could know that he loved it.

Before he reached the town, the stars were out, and the last of the sunset had faded away. Earth was gone,

and heaven was all. Joseph was now a reader, and read geology and astronomy: "I've got to do with them all!" he said to himself, looking up. "There lie the fields of my future, when this chain of gravity is unbound from my feet! Blessed am I here now, my God, and blessed shall I be there then."

When he reached the suburbs, the light of homes was shining through curtains of all colours. "Every nest has its own birds," said Joseph; "every heart its own joys!" Just then, he was in no mood to think of the sorrows. But the sorrows are sickly things and die, while the joys are strong divine children, and shall live for evermore.

When he reached the streets, all the shops he passed were closed, except the beer-shops and the chemists'. "The nettle and the dock!" said Joseph.

When he reached Mary's shop, he turned into the court to the kitchen-door. "Through the kitchen to the parlour!" he said. "Through the smithy to the presence-chamber! Oh my God—through the mud of me, up to thy righteousness!"

He was in a mood for music—was he not? One might imagine the violin under his arm was possessed by an angel, and, ignoring his ears, was playing straight into his heart!

Beenie let him in, and took him up to the parlour. Mary came half way to meet him. The pressure as of heaven's atmosphere fell around him, calming and elevating. He stepped across the floor, still, stately, and free. He laid down his violin, and seated himself where Mary told him, in her father's arm-chair by the fire. Gentle nothings with a down of rainbows were talked until tea was over, and then without a word they set to their

music—Mary and Joseph, with their own hearts and Letty for their audience.

They had not gone far on the way to fairyland, however, when Beenie called Letty from the room, to speak to a friend and customer, who had come from the country on a sudden necessity for something from the shop. Letty, finding herself not quite equal to the emergency, came in her turn to call Mary: she went as quietly as if she were leaving a tiresome visitor. The music was broken, and Joseph left alone with the dumb instruments.

But in his hands solitude and a violin were sure to marry in music. He began to play, forgot himself utterly, and, when the customer had gone away satisfied, and the ladies returned to the parlour, there he stood with his eyes closed, playing on, nor knowing they were beside him. They sat down, and listened in silence.

Mary had not listened long, before she found herself strangely moved. Her heart seemed to swell up into her throat, and it was all she could do to keep from weeping. A little longer and she was compelled to yield, and the silent tears flowed freely. Letty too was overcome—more than ever she had been by music. She was not so open to its influences as Mary, but her eyes were full, and she sat thinking of her Tom, far in the regions that are none the less true that we cannot see them.

A mood had taken shape in the mind of the blacksmith, and wandered from its home, seeking another country. It is not the ghosts of evil deeds that alone take shape, and go forth to wander the earth. Let but a mood be strong enough, and the soul, clothing itself in that mood as with a garment, can walk abroad and haunt the world. Thus, in a garment of mood whose colour and texture was music, did the soul of Joseph

Jasper that evening, like a homeless ghost, come knocking at the door of Mary Marston. It was the very being of the man, praying for admittance, even as little Abel might have crept up to the gate from which his mother had been driven, and, seeing nothing of the angel with the flaming sword, knocked and knocked, entreating to be let in, pleading that all was not right with the world in which he found himself. And there Mary saw Joseph stand, thinking himself alone with his violin; and the violin was his mediator with her, and was pleading and pleading for the admittance of its master. It prayed, it wept, it implored. It cried aloud that eternity was very long, and like a great palace without a quiet room. "Gorgeous is the glory," it sang; "white are the garments, and lovely are the faces of the holy; they look upon me gently and sweetly, but pitifully, for they know that I am alone—yet not alone, for I love. Oh, rather a thousandfold let me love and be alone, than be content and joyous with them all, free of this pang which tells me of a bliss yet more complete, fulfilling the gladness of heaven!"

All the time, Joseph knew nothing of where his soul was; for he thought Mary was in the shop, and beyond the hearing of his pleader. Nor was this exactly the shape the thing took to the consciousness of the musician. He seemed to himself to be standing alone in a starry and moonlit night, among roses, and sweet-peas, and apple-blossoms, for the soul cares little for the seasons, and will make its own month out of many. On the bough of an apple-tree, in the fair moonlight, sat a nightingale, swaying to and fro like one mad with the wine of his own music, singing as if he wanted to break his heart and have done, for the delight was too much for mortal creature to endure. And the song of the bird

grew the prayer of a man in the brain and heart of the musician, and thence burst, through the open fountain of the violin, and worked what it could work, in the world of forces. "I love thee! I love thee! I love thee!" cried the violin; and the worship was entreaty that knew not itself. On and on it went, ever beginning ere it ended, as if it could never come to a close; and the two sat listening as if they cared but to hear, and would listen for ever—listening as if when the sound ceased all would be at an end, and chaos come again.

Ah, do not blame, thou who lovest God, and fearest the love of the human! Hast thou yet to learn that the love of the human is love, is divine, is but a lower form of a part of the love of God? When thou lovest man, or woman, or child, yea, or even dog, aright, then wilt thou no longer need that I tell thee how God and his Christ would not be content with each other alone in the glories even of the eternal original love, because they could create more love. For that more love, together they suffered, and patiently waited. He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?

A sob, like a bird new born, burst from Mary's bosom. It broke the enchantment in which Joseph was bound. That enchantment had possessed him, usurping as it were the throne of his life, and displacing it: when it ceased, he was not his own master. He started—to conscious confusion only, neither knowing where he was nor what he did. His limbs for the moment were hardly his own. How it happened he never could tell, but he brought down his violin with a crash against the piano, then somehow stumbled and all but fell. In the act of recovering himself, he heard the neck of his instrument part from the body with a tearing discordant cry, like

the sound of the ruin of a living world. He stood up, understanding now, holding in his hand his dead music, and regarding it with a smile sad as a winter sunset gleaming over a grave. But Mary darted to him, threw her arms round him, laid her head on his bosom, and burst into tears. Tenderly he laid his broken violin on the piano, and, like one receiving a gift straight from the hand of the Godhead, folded his arms around the woman—enough, if music itself had been blotted from his universe! His violin was broken, but his being was made whole! his treasure taken—type of his self, and a woman given him instead!

“It’s just like him!” he murmured.

He was thinking of him who, when a man was brought him to be delivered from a poor palsy, forgave him his sins.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING.

JOSEPH JASPER and Mary Marston were married the next summer. Mary did not leave her shop, nor did Joseph leave his forge. Mary was proud of her husband, not merely because he was a musician, but because he was a blacksmith. For with the true taste of a right woman, she honoured the manhood that could do hard work. The day will come, and may I do something to help it hither, when the youth of our country will recognize that, taken in itself, it is a more manly, and therefore in the old true sense a more *gentle* thing, to follow a good handicraft, if it make the hands black as a coal, than to spend the day in keeping books, and making up accounts, though therein the hands should

remain white—or red, as the case may be. Not but that, from a higher point of view still, all work, set by God, and done divinely, is of equal honour; but where there is a choice, I would gladly see boy of mine choose rather to be a blacksmith, or a watchmaker, or a book-binder, than a clerk. Production, making, is a higher thing in the scale of reality, than any mere transmission, such as buying and selling. It is besides easier to do honest work than to buy and sell honestly. The more honour of course to those who are honest under the greater difficulty! But the man who knows how needful the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," knows that he must not be tempted into temptation even by the glory of duty under difficulty. In humility we must choose the easiest, as we must hold our faces unflinchingly to the hardest, even to the seeming impossible, when it is given us to do.

I must show the blacksmith and the shopkeeper once more—two years after marriage—time long enough to have made common people as common to each other as the weed by the roadside; but these are not common to each other yet, and never will be. They will never complain of being *désillusionnés*, for they have never been illuded. They look up each to the other still, because they were right in looking up each to the other from the first. Each was, and therefore each is and will be real.

"The man is honest."

"Therefore he will be, Timon."

It was a lovely morning in summer. The sun was but a little way above the horizon, and the dew-drops seemed to have come scattering from him as he shook his locks when he rose. The foolish larks were up of course, for they fancied, come what might of winter and

rough weather, the universe founded in eternal joy, and themselves endowed with the best of all rights to be glad, for there was the gladness inside, and struggling to get outside of them. And out it was coming in a divine profusion! How many baskets would not have been wanted to gather up the lordly waste of those scattered songs! In all the trees, in all the flowers, in every grass blade, and every weed, the sun was warming and coaxing and soothing life into higher life. And in those two on the path through the fields from Testbridge, the same sun, light from the father of lights, was nourishing highest life of all—that for the sake of which the Lord came, that he might set it growing in hearts of whose existence it was the very root.

Joseph and Mary were taking their walk together before the day's work should begin. Those who have a good conscience, and are not at odds with their work, can take their pleasure any time—as well before their work as after it. Only where the work of the day is a burden grievous to be borne, is there cause to fear being unfitted for duty by antecedent pleasure. But the joy of the sunrise would linger about Mary all the day long in the gloomy shop; and for Joseph, he had but to lift his head to see the sun hastening on to the softer and yet more hopeful splendours of the evening. The wife, who had not to begin so early, was walking with her husband, as was her custom, even when the weather was not of the best, to see him fairly started on his day's work. It was with something very like pride, yet surely nothing evil, that she would watch the quick blows of his brawny arm, as he beat the cold iron on the anvil till it was all aglow like the sun that lighted the world—then stuck it into the middle of his coals, and blew softly with his bellows till the flame on the altar of his work-offering

was awake and keen. The sun might shine or forbear, the wind might blow or be still, the path might be crisp with frost or soft with mire, but the lighting of her husband's forge-fire, Mary, without some forceful reason, never omitted to turn by her presence into a holy ceremony. It was to her the "Come let us worship and bow down" of the daily service of God-given labour. That done, she would kiss him, and leave him: she had her own work to do. Filled with prayer she would walk steadily back the well-known way to the shop, where, all day long, ministering with gracious service to the wants of her people, she would know the evening and its service drawing nearer and nearer, when Joseph would come, and the delights of heaven would begin afresh at home, in music, and verse, and trustful talk. Every day was a life, and every evening a blessed death—type of that larger evening rounding our day with larger hope. But many Christians are such awful pagans that they will hardly believe it possible a young loving pair should think of that evening, except with misery and by rare compulsion!

That morning, as they went, they talked—thus, or something like this.

"Oh, Mary!" said Joseph, "hear the larks! They are all saying, 'Jo-seph! Jo-seph! Harkentome, Jo-seph! WhatwouldyouhavebeenbutforMa-ry, Jo-seph?' That's what they keep on singing, singing in the ears of my heart, Mary!"

"You would have been a true man, Joseph, whatever the larks may say."

"A solitary melody, praising without an upholding harmony, at best, Mary!"

"And what should I have been, Joseph? An in-

articulate harmony—sweetly mumbling, with never a thread of soaring song!”

A pause followed.

“I shall be rather shy of your father, Mary,” said Joseph. “Perhaps he won’t be content with me.”

“Even if you weren’t what you are, my father would love you because I love you. But I know my father as well as I know you; and I know you are just the man it must make him happy afresh, even in heaven, to think of his Mary marrying. You two can hardly be of two minds in anything!”

“That was a curious speech of Letty’s yesterday! You heard her say, did you not, that, if everybody was to be so very good in heaven, she was afraid it would be rather dull?”

“We mustn’t make too much of what Letty says, either when she’s merry or when she’s miserable. She speaks both times only out of half-way down.”

“Yes, yes! I wasn’t meaning to find any fault with her; I was only wishing to hear what you would say. For nobody can make a story without somebody wicked to set things wrong in it, and then all the work lies in setting them right again, and as soon as they are set right, then the story stops.”

“There’s nothing of the sort in music, Joseph, and that makes one happy enough.”

“Yes, there is, Mary. There’s strife and difference and compensation and atonement and reconciliation.”

“But there’s nothing wicked.”

“No, that there is not.”

“Well!” said Mary; “perhaps it may only be because we know so little about good, that it seems to us not enough. We know only the beginnings and the fightings, and so write and talk only about them. For my part, I

don't feel that strife of any sort is necessary to make me enjoy life; of all things it is what makes me miserable. I grant you that effort and struggle add immeasurably to the enjoyment of life, but those I look upon as labour, not strife. There may be whole worlds for us to help bring into order and obedience. And I suspect there must be no end of work in which is strife enough—and that of a kind hard to bear. There must be millions of spirits in prison that want preaching to; and whoever goes among them will have that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ to fill up. Anyhow there will be plenty to do, and that's the main thing. Seeing we are made in the image of God, and he is always working, we could not be happy without work."

"Do you think we shall get into any company we like up there?" said Joseph.

"I must think a minute. When I want to understand, I find myself listening for what my father would say.—Yes, I think I know what he would say to that:—'Yes; but not till you are fit for it; and then the difficulty would be to keep out of it. For all that is fit must come to pass in the land of fitnesses—that is, the land where all is just as it ought to be.'—That's how I could fancy I heard my father answer you."

"With that answer I am well content," said Joseph. "—But you don't want to die, do you, Mary?"

"No; I want to live. And I've got such a blessed plenty of life while waiting for more, that I am quite content to wait. But I do wonder that some people I know, should cling to what they call life as they do. It is not that they are comfortable, for they are constantly complaining of their sufferings; neither is it from submission to the will of God, for to hear them talk you must think they imagine themselves hardly dealt with; they profess

to believe the Gospel, and that it is their only consolation; and yet they speak of death as the one paramount evil. In the utmost weariness, they yet seem incapable of understanding the apostle's desire to depart and be with Christ, or of imagining that to be with him can be at all so good as remaining where they are. One is driven to ask whether they can be Christians any further than anxiety to secure whatever the profession may be worth to them will make them such."

"Don't you think, though," said Joseph, "that some people have a trick of putting on their clothes wrong side out, and so making themselves appear less respectable than they are? There was my sister Ann: she used to go on scolding at people for not believing, all the time she said they could not believe till God made them—if she had said *except* God made them, I should have been with her there!—and then talking about God so, that I don't see how, even if they could, any one would have believed in such a monster as she made of him; and then, if you objected to believe in such a God, she would tell you it was all from the depravity of your own heart you could not believe in him;—and yet this sister Ann of mine, I know, once went for months without enough to eat—without more than just kept body and soul together, that she might feed the children of a neighbour, of whom she knew next to nothing, when their father lay ill of a fever, and could not provide for them. And she didn't look for any thanks neither, except it was from that same God she would have to be a tyrant from the beginning—one who would calmly behold the unspeakable misery of creatures whom he had compelled to exist, whom he would not permit to cease, and for whom he would do a good deal, but not all that he could. Such people, I think, are nearly as unfair to themselves as they are to God."

"You're right, Joseph," said Mary. "If we won't take the testimony of such against God, neither must we take it against themselves. Only why is it they are always so certain they are in the right?"

"For the perfecting of the saints," suggested Joseph, with a curious smile.

"Perhaps," answered Mary. "Anyhow we may get that good out of them, whether they be here for the purpose or not. I remember Mr. Turnbull once accusing my father of irreverence, because he spoke about God in the shop. Said my father, 'Our Lord called the old temple his father's house and a den of thieves in the same breath.' Mr. Turnbull saw nothing but nonsense in the answer. Said my father then, 'You will allow that God is everywhere?' 'Of course,' replied Mr. Turnbull.—'Except in this shop, I suppose you mean?' said my father.—'No, I don't. That's just why I wouldn't have you do it.' 'Then you wouldn't have me think about him either?' 'Well! there's a time for everything.' Then said my father very solemnly, 'I came from God, and I'm going back to God, and I won't have any gaps of death in the middle of my life.' And that was nothing to Mr. Turnbull either."

To one in ten of my readers it may be something.

Just ere they came in sight of the smithy, they saw a lady and gentleman on horseback flying across the common.

"There go Mrs. Redmain and Mr. Wardour!" said Joseph. "They're to be married next month, they say. Well, it's a handsome couple they'll make! And the two properties together 'll make a fine estate!"

"I hope she'll learn to like the books he does," said Mary. "I never could get her to listen to anything for more than three minutes."

Though Joseph generally dropped work long before Mary shut the shop, she yet not unfrequently contrived to

meet him on his way home; and Joseph always kept looking out for her as he walked.

That very evening they were gradually nearing each other—the one from the smithy, the other from the shop—with another pair between them, however, going towards Testbridge—Godfrey Wardour and Hesper Redmain.

“How strange,” said Hesper, “that after all its chances and breakings, old Thornwick should be joined up again at last!”

Partly by a death in the family, partly through the securities her husband had taken on the property, partly by the will of her father, the whole of Durnmelling now belonged to Hesper.

“It is strange,” answered Godfrey with an involuntary sigh.

Hesper turned and looked at him.

It was not merely sadness she saw on his face. There was something there almost like humility, though Hesper was not able to read it as such. He lifted his head, and did not avoid her gaze.

“You are wondering, Hesper,” he said, “that I do not respond with more pleasure. To tell you the truth, I have come through so much that I am almost afraid to expect the fruition of any good. Please do not imagine, you beautiful creature! it is of the property I am thinking. In your presence that would be impossible. Nor indeed have I begun to think of it. I shall, one day, come to care for it, I do not doubt—that is, when once I have you safe; but I keep looking for the next slip that is to come—between my lip and this full cup of happiness. I have told you all, Hesper, and I thank you that you do not despise me. But it may well make me solemn and fearful, to think, after all the waves and billows that have gone over me, such a splendour should be mine!—But

do you really love me, Hesper—or am I walking in my sleep! I had thought, ‘Surely now at last I shall never love again!’—and instead of that, here I am loving as I never loved before!—and doubting whether I ever did love before!”

“I never loved before,” said Hesper. “Surely to love must be a good thing, when it has made you so good! I am a poor creature beside you, Godfrey, but I am glad to think whatever I know of love you have taught me. It is only I who have to be ashamed!”

“That is all your goodness!” interrupted Godfrey. “Yet at this moment I cannot quite be sorry for some things I ought to be sorry for: but for them I should not be at your side now—happier than I dare allow myself to feel. I dare hardly think of those things, lest I should be glad I had done wrong.”

“There are things I am compelled to know of myself, Godfrey, which I shall never speak to you about, for even to think of them by your side would blast all my joy. How plainly Mary used to tell me what I was! I scorned her words! It seemed then too late to repent. And now I am repenting! I little thought ever to give in like this! But of one thing I am sure—that if I had known you, not all the terrors of my father would have made me marry the man.”

Was this all the feeling she had for her dead husband? Although Godfrey could hardly at the moment feel regret she had not loved him, it yet made him shiver to hear her speak of him thus. In the perfected grandeur of her external womanhood, she seemed to him the very ideal of his imagination, and he felt at moments the proudest man in the great world; but at night he would lie in torture, brooding over the horrors a woman such as she must have encountered, to whom those mysteries

of our nature which the true heart clothes in abundant honour, had been first presented in the distortions of a devilish caricature. There had been a time in Godfrey's life when, had she stood before him in all her splendour, he would have turned from her, because of her history, with a sad disgust. Was he less pure now? He was more pure, for he was humbler. When those terrible thoughts would come, and the darkness about him grow billowy with black flame, "God help me," he would cry, "to make the buffeted angel forget the past!"

They had talked of Mary more than once, and Godfrey, in part through what Hesper told him of her, had come to see that he was unjust to her. I do not mean he had come to know the depth and extent of his injustice—that would imply a full understanding of Mary herself, which was yet far beyond him. A thousand things had to grow, a thousand things to shift and shake themselves together in Godfrey's mind, before he could begin to understand one who cared only for the highest.

Godfrey and Hesper made a glorious pair to look at—but would theirs be a happy union?—Happy, I dare say—and not too happy. He who sees to our affairs will see that the *too* is not in them. There were fine elements in both, and if indeed they loved, and now I think, from very necessity of their two hearts, they must have loved, then all would, by degrees, by slow degrees most likely, come right with them.

If they had been born again both, before they began, so to start fresh, then like two children hand in hand they might have run in through the gates into the city. But what is love, what is loss, what defilement even, what are pains, and hopes, and disappointments, what sorrow, and death, and all the ills that flesh is heir to, but means to this very end, to this waking of the soul to seek the

home of our being—the life eternal? Verily we must be born from above, and be good children, or become, even to our self-loving selves, a scorn, a hissing, and an endless reproach.

If they had had but Mary to talk to them! But they did not want her: she was a good sort of creature, who, with all her disagreeableness, meant them well, and whom they had misjudged a little and made cry! They had no suspicion that she was one of the lights of the world, one of the wells of truth, whose springs are fed by the rains on the eternal hills.

Turning a clump of furze-bushes on the common, they met Mary. She stepped from the path. Mr. Wardour took off his hat. Then Mary knew that his wrath was past, and she was glad.

They stopped.

“Well, Mary,” said Hesper, holding out her hand, and speaking in a tone from which both haughtiness and condescension had vanished, “where are you going?”

“To meet my husband,” answered Mary. “I see him coming.”

With a deep loving look at Hesper, and a bow and a smile to Godfrey, she left them, and hastened to meet her working man.

Behind Godfrey Wardour and Hesper Redmain, walked Joseph Jasper and Mary Marston, a procession of love towards a far-off eternal goal. But which of them was to be first in the kingdom of heaven, Mary or Joseph or Hesper or Godfrey, is not to be told: they had yet a long way to walk, and there are first that shall be last, and last that shall be first.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

MacDonald, George

Mary Marston

Bd.: 2

1881

P.o.angl. 212 s-17/18

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11664595-7